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FROM

Estate of

Mrs. Elisabeth C. D. Chandler

Edition de Luxe

LITTLE DORRIT

BY

CHARLES DICKENS

VOL. II.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. K. BROWNE.

BOSTON
ESTES & LAURIAT
1890

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LITTLE DORRIT.

IN TWO BOOKS.

BOOK THE FIRST. POVERTY—*continued.*

CHAPTER XXIV.

FORTUNE-TELLING.

LITTLE DORRIT received a call that same evening from Mr. Plornish, who, having intimated that he wished to speak to her privately, in a series of coughs so very noticeable as to favor the idea that her father, as regarded her seamstress occupation, was an illustration of the axiom that there are no such stone-blind men as those who will not see, obtained an audience with her on the common staircase outside the door.

"There's been a lady at our place to-day, Miss Dorrit," Plornish growled, "and another one along with her as is a old wixen, if ever I met with such. The way she snapped a person's head off, dear me!"

The mild Plornish was at first quite unable to get his mind away from Mr. F.'s Aunt. "For," said he to excuse himself, "she is, I do assure you, the winegariest party!"

At length, by a great effort, he detached himself from the subject sufficiently to observe, —

"But she's neither here nor there just at present. The other lady, she's Mr. Casby's daughter; and if Mr. Casby ain't well off, none better, it ain't through any fault of Pancks. For, as to Pancks, he does, he really does, he does indeed!"

Mr. Plornish, after his usual manner, was a little obscure, but conscientiously emphatic.

"And what she come to our place for," he pursued, "was to leave word that if Miss Dorrit would step up to that card — which it's Mr. Casby's house that is, and Pancks he has a office at the back, where he really does, beyond belief — she would be glad for to engage her. She was a old and dear friend, she said particular, of Mr. Clennam, and hoped for to prove herself a useful friend to *his* friend. Them was her words. Wishing to know whether Miss Dorrit could come to-morrow morning, I said I would see you, miss, and inquire, and look round there to-night to say yes, or, if you was engaged to-morrow, when."

"I can go to-morrow, thank you," said Little Dorrit. "This is very kind of you, but you are always kind."

Mr. Plornish, with a modest disavowal of his merits, opened the room-door for her readmission, and followed her in with such an exceedingly bald pretence of not having been out at all, that her father might have observed it without being very suspicious. In his affable unconsciousness, however, ne took no heed. Plornish, after a little conversation, in which he blended his former duty as a collegian with his present privilege as a humble

outside friend, qualified again by his low estate as a plasterer, took his leave; making the tour of the prison before he left, and looking on at a game of skittles, with the mixed feelings of an old inhabitant who had his private reasons for believing that it might be his destiny to come back again.

Early in the morning, Little Dorrit, leaving Maggy in high domestic trust, set off for the Patriarchal tent. She went by the Iron Bridge, though it cost her a penny, and walked more slowly in that part of her journey than in any other. At five minutes before eight her hand was on the Patriarchal knocker, which was quite as high as she could reach.

She gave Mrs. Finching's card to the young woman who opened the door, and the young woman told her that "Miss Flora" — Flora having on her return to the parental roof, reinvested herself with the title under which she had lived there — was not yet out of her bedroom, but she was to please to walk up into Miss Flora's sitting-room. She walked up into Miss Flora's sitting-room, as in duty bound, and there found a breakfast-table comfortably laid for two, with a supplementary tray upon it laid for one. The young woman, disappearing for a few moments, returned to say that she was to please to take a chair by the fire, and to take off her bonnet and make herself at home. But Little Dorrit being bashful, and not used to make herself at home on such occasions, felt at a loss how to do it; so she was still sitting near the door with her bonnet on, when Flora came in in a hurry, half an hour afterwards.

Flora was so sorry to have kept her waiting, and

good gracious why did she sit out there in the cold when she had expected to find her by the fire reading the paper, and hadn't that heedless girl given her the message then, and had she really been in her bonnet all this time, and pray for goodness' sake let Flora take it off! Flora, taking it off in the best-natured manner in the world, was so struck by the face disclosed, that she said, "Why, what a good little thing you are, my dear!" and pressed the face between her hands like the gentlest of women.

It was the word and the action of a moment. Little Dorrit had hardly time to think how kind it was, when Flora dashed at the breakfast-table, full of business, and plunged over head and ears into loquacity.

"Really so sorry that I should happen to be late on this morning of all mornings because my intention and my wish was to be ready to meet you when you came in and to say that any one that interested Arthur Clennam half so much must interest me and that I gave you the heartiest welcome and was so glad, instead of which they never called me and there I still am snoring I dare say if the truth was known and if you don't like either cold fowl or hot boiled ham which many people don't I dare say besides Jews and theirs are scruples of conscience which we must all respect though I must say I wish they had them equally strong when they sell us false articles for real that certainly ain't worth the money I shall be quite vexed," said Flora.

Little Dorrit thanked her, and said, shyly, bread and butter and tea was all she usually —

"Oh nonsense my dear child I can never hear of that," said Flora, turning on the urn in the most

reckless manner, and making herself wink by splashing hot water into her eyes as she bent down to look into the teapot. "You are come here on the footing of a friend and companion you know if you will let me take that liberty and I should be ashamed of myself indeed if you could come here upon any other, besides which Arthur Clennam spoke in such terms—you are tired my dear."

"No, ma'am."

"You turn so pale you have walked too far before breakfast and I dare say live a great way off and ought to have had a ride," said Flora, "dear dear is there anything that would do you good?"

"Indeed, I am quite well, ma'am. I thank you again and again, but I am quite well."

"Then take your tea at once I beg," said Flora, "and this wing of fowl and bit of ham, don't mind me or wait for me because I always carry in this tray myself to Mr. F.'s Aunt who breakfasts in bed and a charming old lady too and very clever, Portrait of Mr. F. behind the door and very like though too much forehead and as to a pillar with a marble pavement and balustrades and a mountain I never saw him near it nor not likely in the wine trade, excellent man but not at all in that way."

Little Dorrit glanced at the portrait, very imperfectly following the references to that work of art.

"Mr. F. was so devoted to me that he never could bear me out of his sight," said Flora, "though of course I am unable to say how long that might have lasted if he hadn't been cut short while I was a new broom, worthy man but not poetical manly prose but not romance."

Little Dorrit glanced at the portrait again. The

artist had given it a head that would have been, in an intellectual point of view, top-heavy for Shakspeare.

"Romance, however," Flora went on, busily arranging Mr. F.'s Aunt's toast, "as I openly said to Mr. F. when he proposed to me and you will be surprised to hear that he proposed seven times once in a hackney-coach once in a boat once in a pew once on a donkey at Tunbridge Wells and the rest on his knees, Romance was fled with the early days of Arthur Clennam, our parents tore us asunder we became marble and stern reality usurped the throne, Mr. F. said very much to his credit that he was perfectly aware of it and even preferred that state of things accordingly the word was spoken the fiat went forth and such is life you see my dear and yet we do not break but bend, pray make a good breakfast while I go in with the tray."

She disappeared, leaving Little Dorrit to ponder over the meaning of her scattered words. She soon came back again; and at last began to take her own breakfast, talking all the while.

"You see my dear," said Flora, measuring out a spoonful or two of some brown liquid that smelt like brandy, and putting it into her tea, "I am obliged to be careful to follow the directions of my medical man though the flavor is anything but agreeable being a poor creature and it may be have never recovered the shock received in youth from too much giving way to crying in the next room when separated from Arthur, have you known him long?"

As soon as Little Dorrit comprehended that she had been asked this question — for which time was

necessary, the galloping pace of her new patroness having left her far behind — she answered that she had known Mr. Clennam ever since his return.

"To be sure you couldn't have known him before unless you had been in China or had corresponded neither of which is likely," returned Flora, "for travelling people usually get more or less mahogany and you are not at all so and as to corresponding what about? that's very true unless tea, so it was at his mother's was it really that you knew him first, highly sensible and firm but dreadfully severe — ought to be the mother of the man in the iron mask."

"Mrs. Clennam has been kind to me," said Little Dorrit.

"Really? I am sure I am glad to hear it because as Arthur's mother it's naturally pleasant to my feelings to have a better opinion of her than I had before, though what she thinks of me when I run on as I am certain to do and she sits glowering at me like Fate in a go-cart — shocking comparison really — invalid and not her fault — I never know or can imagine."

"Shall I find my work anywhere, ma'am?" asked Little Dorrit, looking timidly about; "can I get it?"

"You industrious little fairy," returned Flora, taking, in another cup of tea, another of the doses prescribed by her medical man, "there's not the slightest hurry and it's better that we should begin by being confidential about our mutual friend — too cold a word for me at least I don't mean that, very proper expression mutual friend — than become through mere formalities not you but me like

the Spartan boy with the fox biting him, which I hope you'll excuse my bringing up for of all the tiresome boys that will go tumbling into every sort of company that boy's the tiresomest."

Little Dorrit, her face very pale, sat down again to listen. "Hadn't I better work the while?" she asked. "I can work and attend too. I would rather, if I may."

Her earnestness was so expressive of her being uneasy without her work, that Flora answered, "Well my dear whatever you like best," and produced a basket of white handkerchiefs. Little Dorrit gladly put it by her side, took out her little pocket housewife, threaded her needle, and began to hem.

"What nimble fingers you have," said Flora, "but are you sure you are well?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!"

Flora put her feet upon the fender, and settled herself for a thorough good romantic disclosure. She started off at score, tossing her head, sighing in the most demonstrative manner, making a great deal of use of her eyebrows, and occasionally, but not often, glancing at the quiet face that bent over the work.

"You must know my dear," said Flora, "but that I have no doubt you know already not only because I have already thrown it out in a general way but because I feel I carry it stamped in burning what's-his-names upon my brow that before I was introduced to the late Mr. F. I had been engaged to Arthur Clennam — Mr. Clennam in public where reserve is necessary Arthur here — we were all in all to one another it was the morning of life it was

bliss it was frenzy it was everything else of that sort in the highest degree, when rent asunder we turned to stone in which capacity Arthur went to China and I became the statue bride of the late Mr. F."

Flora, uttering these words in a deep voice, enjoyed herself immensely.

"To paint," said she, "the emotions of that morning when all was marble within and Mr. F.'s Aunt followed in a glass-coach which it stands to reason must have been in shameful repair or it never could have broken down two streets from the house and Mr. F.'s Aunt brought home like the fifth of November in a rush-bottomed chair I will not attempt, suffice it to say that the hollow form of breakfast took place in the dining-room down-stairs that papa partaking too freely of pickled salmon was ill for weeks and that Mr. F. and myself went upon a continental tour to Calais where the people fought for us on the pier until they separated us though not forever that was not yet to be."

The statue bride, hardly pausing for breath, went on, with the greatest complacency, in a rambling manner sometimes incidental to flesh and blood.

"I will draw a veil over that dreamy life, Mr. F. was in good spirits his appetite was good he liked the cookery he considered the wine weak but palatable and all was well, we returned to the immediate neighborhood of Number Thirty Little Gosling Street London Docks and settled down, ere we had yet fully detected the housemaid in selling the feathers out of the spare bed Gout flying upwards soared with Mr. F. to another sphere."

His relict, with a glance at his portrait, shook her head and wiped her eyes.

"I revere the memory of Mr. F. as an estimable man and most indulgent husband, only necessary to mention Asparagus and it appeared or to hint at any little delicate thing to drink and it came like magic in a pint bottle it was not ecstasy but it was comfort, I returned to papa's roof and lived secluded if not happy during some years until one day papa came smoothly blundering in and said that Arthur Clennam awaited me below, I went below and found him ask me not what I found him except that he was still unmarried still unchanged!"

The dark mystery with which Flora now enshrouded herself might have stopped other fingers than the nimble fingers that worked near her. They worked on without pause, and the busy head bent over them watching the stitches.

"Ask me not," said Flora, "if I love him still or if he still loves me or what the end is to be or when, we are surrounded by watchful eyes and it may be that we are destined to pine asunder it may be never more to be reunited not a word not a breath not a look to betray us all must be secret as the tomb wonder not therefore that even if I should seem comparatively cold to Arthur or Arthur should seem comparatively cold to me we have fatal reasons it is enough if we understand them hush!"

All of which Flora said with so much headlong vehemence as if she really believed it. There is not much doubt that, when she worked herself into full mermaid condition, she did actually believe whatever she said in it.

"Hush!" repeated Flora, "I have now told you all, confidence is established between us hush, for Arthur's sake I will always be a friend to you my

dear girl and in Arthur's name you may always rely upon me."

The nimble fingers laid aside the work, and the little figure rose and kissed her hand. "You are very cold," said Flora, changing to her own natural kind-hearted manner, and gaining greatly by the change. "Don't work to-day I am sure you are not well I am sure you are not strong."

"It is only that I feel a little overcome by your kindness, and by Mr. Clennam's kindness in confiding me to one he has known and loved so long."

"Well really my dear," said Flora, who had a decided tendency to be always honest when she gave herself time to think about it, "it's as well to leave that alone now, for I couldn't undertake to say after all, but it doesn't signify lie down a little!"

"I have always been strong enough to do what I want to do, and I shall be quite well directly," returned Little Dorrit with a faint smile. "You have overpowered me with gratitude, that's all. If I keep near the window for a moment, I shall be quite myself."

Flora opened a window, sat her in a chair by it, and considerately retired to her former place. It was a windy day, and the air stirring on Little Dorrit's face soon brightened it. In a very few minutes she returned to her basket of work, and her nimble fingers were as nimble as ever.

Quietly pursuing her task, she asked Flora if Mr. Clennam had told her where she lived. When Flora replied in the negative, Little Dorrit said that she understood why he had been so delicate, but that she felt sure he would approve of her confiding her secret to Flora, and that she would therefore do so now

with Flora's permission. Receiving an encouraging answer, she condensed the narrative of her life into a few scanty words about herself, and a glowing eulogy upon her father; and Flora took it all in with a natural tenderness that quite understood it, and in which there was no incoherence.

When dinner-time came, Flora drew the arm of her new charge through hers, and led her downstairs, and presented her to the Patriarch and Mr. Pancks, who were already in the dining-room waiting to begin. (Mr. F.'s Aunt was, for the time, laid up in ordinary in her chamber.) By those gentlemen she was received according to their characters; the Patriarch appearing to do her some inestimable service in saying that he was glad to see her, glad to see her; and Mr. Pancks blowing off his favorite sound as a salute.

In that new presence she would have been bashful enough under any circumstances, and particularly under Flora's insisting on her drinking a glass of wine, and eating of the best that was there; but her constraint was greatly increased by Mr. Pancks. The demeanor of that gentleman at first suggested to her mind that he might be a taker of likenesses, so intently did he look at her, and so frequently did he glance at the little note-book by his side. Observing that he made no sketch, however, and that he talked about business only, she began to have suspicions that he represented some creditor of her father's, the balance due to whom was noted in that pocket volume. Regarded from this point of view, Mr. Pancks's puffings expressed injury and impatience, and each of his louder snorts became a demand for payment.

But here, again, she was undeceived by anomalous and incongruous conduct on the part of Mr. Pancks himself. She had left the table half an hour, and was at work alone. Flora had "gone to lie down" in the next room, concurrently with which retirement a smell of something to drink had broken out in the house. The Patriarch was fast asleep, with his philanthropic mouth open, under a yellow pocket-handkerchief in the dining-room. At this quiet time Mr. Pancks softly appeared before her, urbanely nodding.

"Find it a little dull, Miss Dorrit?" inquired Pancks in a low voice.

"No, thank you, sir," said Little Dorrit.

"Busy, I see," observed Mr. Pancks, stealing into the room by inches. "What are those, now, Miss Dorrit?"

"Handkerchiefs."

"Are they, though?" said Pancks. "I shouldn't have thought it." Not in the least looking at them, but looking at Little Dorrit. "Perhaps you wonder who I am. Shall I tell you? I am a fortune-teller."

Little Dorrit now began to think he was mad.

"I belong, body and soul, to my proprietor," said Pancks; "you saw my proprietor having his dinner below. But I do a little in the other way sometimes; privately, very privately, Miss Dorrit."

Little Dorrit looked at him doubtfully, and not without alarm. "I wish you would show me the palm of your hand," said Pancks. "I should like to have a look at it. Don't let me be troublesome."

He was so far troublesome that he was not at all wanted there, but she laid her work in her lap for a

moment, and held out her left hand with the thimble on it.

"Years of toil, eh?" said Pancks softly, touching it with his blunt forefinger. "But what else are we made for? Nothing. Hallo!" looking into the lines. "What's this with bars? It's a college! And what's this with a gray gown and a black velvet cap? It's a father! And what's this with a clarionet? It's an uncle! And what's this in dancing shoes? It's a sister! And what's this straggling about in an idle sort of a way? It's a brother! And what's this thinking for 'em all? Why, this is you, Miss Dorrit!"

Her eyes met his as she looked up wonderingly into his face, and she thought that, although his were sharp eyes, he was a brighter and gentler-looking man than she had supposed at dinner. His eyes were on her hand again directly, and her opportunity of confirming or correcting the impression was gone.

"Now, the deuce is in it," muttered Pancks, tracing out a line in her hand with his clumsy finger, "if this isn't me in the corner here! What do I want here? What's behind me?"

He carried his finger slowly down to the wrist, and round the wrist, and affected to look at the back of the hand for what was behind him.

"Is it any harm?" asked Little Dorrit, smiling.

"Deuce a bit!" said Pancks. "What do you think it's worth?"

"I ought to ask you that. I am not the fortune-teller."

"True," said Pancks. "What's it worth? You shall live to see, Miss Dorrit."

Releasing the hand by slow degrees, he drew all his fingers through his prongs of hair, so that they stood up in their most portentous manner; and repeated slowly, "Remember what I say, Miss Dorrit. You shall live to see."

She could not help showing that she was much surprised, if it were only by his knowing so much about her.

"Ah! That's it!" said Pancks pointing at her. "Miss Dorrit, not that ever!"

More surprised than before, and a little more frightened, she looked to him for an explanation of his last words.

"Not that," said Pancks, making, with great seriousness, an imitation of a surprised look and manner, that appeared to be unintentionally grotesque. "Don't do that. Never on seeing me, no matter when, no matter where. I am nobody. Don't take on to mind me. Don't mention me. Take no notice. Will you agree, Miss Dorrit?"

"I hardly know what to say," returned Little Dorrit, quite astounded. "Why?"

"Because I am a fortune-teller. Pancks the gypsy. I haven't told you so much of your fortune yet, Miss Dorrit, as to tell you what's behind me on that little hand. I have told you you shall live to see. Is it agreed, Miss Dorrit?"

"Agreed that I — am — to" —

"To take no notice of me away from here, unless I take on first. Not to mind me when I come and go. It's very easy. I am no loss, I am not handsome. I am not good company, I am only my proprietor's grubber. You need do no more than think, 'Ah! Pancks the gypsy at his fortune-telling —

he'll tell the rest of my fortune one day — I shall live to know it.' Is it agreed, Miss Dorrit?"

"Ye-es," faltered Little Dorrit, whom he greatly confused, "I suppose so, while you do no harm."

"Good!" Mr. Pancks glanced at the wall of the adjoining room, and stooped forward. "Honest creature, woman of capital points, but heedless and a loose talker, Miss Dorrit." With that he rubbed his hands as if the interview had been very satisfactory to him, panted away to the door, and urbanely nodded himself out again.

If Little Dorrit were beyond measure perplexed by this curious conduct on the part of her new acquaintance, and by finding herself involved in this singular treaty, her perplexity was not diminished by ensuing circumstances. Besides that Mr. Pancks took every opportunity afforded him in Mr. Casby's house of significantly glancing at her and snorting at her — which was not much, after what he had done already — he began to pervade her daily life. She saw him in the street constantly. When she went to Mr. Casby's, he was always there. When she went to Mrs. Clennam's, he came there on any pretence, as if to keep her in his sight. A week had not gone by when she found him, to her astonishment, in the lodge one night, conversing with the turnkey on duty, and to all appearance one of his familiar companions. Her next surprise was to find him equally at his ease within the prison; to hear of his presenting himself among the visitors at her father's Sunday levee; to see him arm in arm with a collegiate friend about the yard; to learn, from Fame, that he had greatly distinguished himself one evening at the social club that

held its meetings in the Snuggery, by addressing a speech to the members of that institution, singing a song, and treating the company to five gallons of ale — report madly added a bushel of shrimps. The effect on Mr. Plornish of such of these phenomena as he became an eye-witness of, in his faithful visits, made an impression on Little Dorrit only second to that produced by the phenomena themselves. They seemed to gag and bind him. He could only stare, and sometimes weakly mutter that it wouldn't be believed down Bleeding Heart Yard that this was Pancks; but he never said a word more, or made a sign more, even to Little Dorrit. Mr. Pancks crowned his mysteries by making himself acquainted with Tip in some unknown manner, and taking a Sunday saunter into the college on that gentleman's arm. Throughout he never took any notice of Little Dorrit, save once or twice when he happened to come close to her, and there was no one very near; on which occasions he said in passing, with a friendly look and a puff of encouragement, "Pancks the gypsy — fortune-telling."

Little Dorrit worked and strove as usual, wondering at all this, but keeping her wonder, as she had from her earliest years kept many heavier loads, in her own breast. A change had stolen, and was stealing yet, over the patient heart. Every day found her something more retiring than the day before. To pass in and out of the prison unnoticed, and elsewhere to be overlooked and forgotten, were, for herself, her chief desires.

To her own room, too, strangely assorted room for her delicate youth and character, she was glad to

retreat as often as she could without desertion of any duty. There were afternoon times when she was unemployed, when visitors dropped in to play a hand at cards with her father, when she could be spared and was better away. Then she would flit along the yard, climb the scores of stairs that led to her room, and take her seat at the window. Many combinations did those spikes upon the wall assume, many light shapes did the strong iron weave itself into, many golden touches fell upon the rust, while Little Dorrit sat there musing. New zigzags sprung into the cruel pattern sometimes, when she saw it through a burst of tears; but beautiful or hardened still, always over it and under it and through it, she was fain to look in her solitude, seeing everything with that ineffaceable brand.

A garret, and a Marshalsea garret without compromise, was Little Dorrit's room. Beautifully kept, it was ugly in itself, and had little but cleanliness and air to set it off; for what embellishment she had ever been able to buy had gone to her father's room. Howbeit, for this poor place she showed an increasing love; and to sit in it alone became her favorite rest.

Insomuch that on a certain afternoon, during the Pancks mysteries, when she was seated at her window, and heard Maggy's well-known step coming up the stairs, she was very much disturbed by the apprehension of being summoned away. As Maggy's step came higher up and nearer, she trembled and faltered, and it was as much as she could do to speak when Maggy at length appeared.

"Please, Little Mother," said Maggy, panting for breath, "you must come down and see him. He's here."

"Who, Maggy?"

"Who! O' course, Mr. Clennam. He's in your father's room, and he says to me, 'Maggy, will you be so kind and go and say it's only me?'"

"I am not very well, Maggy. I had better not go. I am going to lie down. See! I lie down now to ease my head. Say, with my grateful regard, that you left me so, or I would have come."

"Well, it ain't very polite, though, Little Mother," said the staring Maggy, "to turn your face away, neither!"

Maggy was very susceptible to personal slights, and very ingenious in inventing them. "Putting both your hands afore your face, too!" she went on. "If you can't bear the looks of a poor thing, it would be better to tell her so at once, and not go and shut her out like that, hurting her feelings and breaking her heart at ten year old, poor thing!"

"It's to ease my head, Maggy."

"Well, and if you cry to ease your head, Little Mother, let me cry too. Don't go and have all the crying to yourself," expostulated Maggy; "that ain't not being greedy." And immediately began to blubber.

It was with some difficulty that she could be induced to go back with the excuse; but the promise of being told a story — of old her great delight — on condition that she concentrated her faculties upon the errand, and left her little mistress to herself for an hour longer, combined with a misgiving on Maggy's part that she had left her good temper at the bottom of the staircase, prevailed. So away she went, muttering her message all the way to keep it in her mind, and, at the appointed time, came back.

"He was very sorry, I can tell you," she announced, "and wanted to send a doctor. And he's coming again to-morrow, he is, and I don't think he'll have a good sleep to-night along o' hearing about your head, Little Mother. Oh my! Ain't you been a-crying!"

"I think I have a little, Maggy."

"A little! Oh!"

"But it's all over now — all over for good, Maggy. And my head is much better and cooler, and I am quite comfortable. I am very glad I did not go down."

Her great staring child tenderly embraced her; and having smoothed her hair, and bathed her forehead and eyes with cold water (offices in which her awkward hands became skilful), hugged her again, exulted in her brighter looks, and stationed her in her chair by the window. Over against this chair, Maggy, with apoplectic exertions that were not at all required, dragged the box which was her seat on story-telling occasions, sat down upon it, hugged her own knees, and said, with a voracious appetite for stories, and with widely opened eyes, —

"Now, Little Mother, let's have a good 'un!"

"What shall it be about, Maggy?"

"Oh, let's have a Princess!" said Maggy, "and let her be a reg'lar one. Beyond all belief, you know!"

Little Dorrit considered for a moment; and with a rather sad smile upon her face, which was flushed by the sunset, began: —

"Maggy, there was once upon a time a fine King, and he had everything he could wish for, and a great deal more. He had gold and silver, diamonds

and rubies, riches of every kind. He had palaces, and he had" —

"Hospitals," interposed Maggy, still nursing her knees. "Let him have hospitals, because they're so comfortable. Hospitals with lots of Chicking."

"Yes, he had plenty of them, and he had plenty of everything."

"Plenty of baked potatoes, for instance," said Maggy.

"Plenty of everything."

"Lor!" chuckled Maggy, giving her knees a hug. "Wasn't it prime!"

"This King had a daughter, who was the wisest and most beautiful Princess that ever was seen. When she was a child, she understood all her lessons before her masters taught them to her; and, when she was grown up, she was the wonder of the world. Now, near the Palace where this Princess lived, there was a cottage in which there was a poor little tiny woman, who lived all alone by herself."

"A old woman," said Maggy with an unctuous smack of her lips.

"No, not an old woman. Quite a young one."

"I wonder she warn't afraid," said Maggy. "Go on, please."

"The Princess passed the cottage nearly every day, and, whenever she went by in her beautiful carriage, she saw the poor tiny woman spinning at her wheel, and she looked at the tiny woman, and the tiny woman looked at her. So, one day she stopped the coachman a little way from the cottage, and got out and walked on, and peeped in at the door, and there, as usual, was the tiny woman spin-

ning at her wheel, and she looked at the Princess, and the Princess looked at her."

"Like trying to stare one another out," said Maggy. "Please go on, Little Mother."

"The Princess was such a wonderful Princess that she had the power of knowing secrets, and she said to the tiny woman, Why do you keep it there? This showed her directly that the Princess knew why she lived all alone by herself spinning at her wheel, and she kneeled down at the Princess's feet, and asked her never to betray her. So the Princess said, I never will betray you. Let me see it. So, the tiny woman closed the shutter of the cottage window and fastened the door, and, trembling from head to foot for fear that any one should suspect her, opened a very secret place, and showed the Princess a shadow."

"Lor!" said Maggy.

"It was the shadow of Some one who had gone by long before: of Some one who had gone on far away quite out of reach, never, never to come back. It was bright to look at; and, when the tiny woman showed it to the Princess, she was proud of it with all her heart, as a great, great treasure. When the Princess had considered it a little while, she said to the tiny woman, And you keep watch over this every day? And she cast down her eyes, and whispered, Yes. Then the Princess said, Remind me why. To which the other replied that no one so good and kind had ever passed that way, and that was why in the beginning. She said, too, that nobody missed it, that nobody was the worse for it, that Some one had gone on to those who were expecting him" —

"Some one was a man, then?" interposed Maggy.

Little Dorrit timidly said yes, she believed so; and resumed: —

"— Had gone on to those who were expecting him, and that this remembrance was stolen or kept back from nobody. The Princess made answer, Ah! But when the cottager died it would be discovered there. The tiny woman told her No: when that time came, it would sink quietly into her own grave, and would never be found."

"Well to be sure!" said Maggy. "Go on, please."

"The Princess was very much astonished to hear this, as you may suppose, Maggy."

("And well she might be," said Maggy.)

"So she resolved to watch the tiny woman, and see what came of it. Every day she drove in her beautiful carriage by the cottage door, and there she saw the tiny woman always alone by herself spinning at her wheel, and she looked at the tiny woman, and the tiny woman looked at her. At last one day the wheel was still, and the tiny woman was not to be seen. When the Princess made inquiries why the wheel had stopped, and where the tiny woman was, she was informed that the wheel had stopped because there was nobody to turn it, the tiny woman being dead."

("They ought to have took her to the hospital," said Maggy, "and then she'd have got over it.")

"The Princess, after crying a very little for the loss of the tiny woman, dried her eyes, and got out of her carriage at the place where she had stopped it before, and went to the cottage, and peeped in

at the door. There was nobody to look at her now, and nobody for her to look at, so she went in at once to search for the treasured shadow. But there was no sign of it to be found anywhere; and then she knew that the tiny woman had told her the truth, and that it would never give anybody any trouble, and that it had sunk quietly into her own grave, and that she and it were at rest together.

"That's all, Maggy."

The sunset flush was so bright on Little Dorrit's face when she came thus to the end of her story, that she interposed her hand to shade it.

"Had she got to be old?" Maggy asked.

"The tiny woman?"

"Ah!"

"I don't know," said Little Dorrit. "But it would have been just the same, if she had been ever and ever so old."

"Would it raly!" said Maggy. "Well, I suppose it would, though." And sat staring and ruminating.

She sat so long with her eyes wide open, that at length Little Dorrit, to entice her from her box, rose and looked out of window. As she glanced down into the yard, she saw Pancks come in, and leer up with the corner of his eye as he went by.

"Who's he, Little Mother?" said Maggy. She had joined her at the window, and was leaning on her shoulder. "I see him come in and out often."

"I have heard him called a fortune-teller," said Little Dorrit. "But I doubt if he could tell many people even their past or present fortunes."

"Couldn't have told the Princess hers?" said Maggy.

Little Dorrit, looking musingly down into the dark valley of the prison, shook her head.

"Nor the tiny woman hers?" said Maggy.

"No," said Little Dorrit, with the sunset very bright upon her. "But let us come away from the window."

CHAPTER XXV.

CONSPIRATORS AND OTHERS.

THE private residence of Mr. Pancks was in Pentonville, where he lodged on the second floor of a professional gentleman in an extremely small way, who had an inner door within the street-door, poised on a spring, and starting open with a click like a trap; and who wrote up in the fanlight, RUGG, GENERAL AGENT, ACCOUNTANT, DEBTS RECOVERED.

This scroll, majestic in its severe simplicity, illuminated a little slip of front garden abutting on the thirsty high-road, where a few of the dustiest of leaves hung their dismal heads, and led a life of choking. A professor of writing occupied the first floor, and enlivened the garden railings with glass cases containing choice examples of what his pupils had been before six lessons and while the whole of his young family shook the table, and what they had become after six lessons when the young family was under restraint. The tenancy of Mr. Pancks was limited to one airy bedroom; he covenanting and agreeing with Mr. Rugg, his landlord, that in consideration of a certain scale of payments accurately defined, and on certain verbal notice duly given, he should be at liberty to elect to share the

Sunday breakfast, dinner, tea, or supper, or each or any or all of those repasts or meals, of Mr. and Miss Rugg (his daughter) in the back-parlor.

Miss Rugg was a lady of a little property, which she had acquired, together with much distinction in the neighborhood, by having her heart severely lacerated and her feelings mangled by a middle-aged baker, resident in the vicinity, against whom she had, by the agency of Mr. Rugg, found it necessary to proceed at law to recover damages for a breach of promise of marriage. The baker, having been, by the counsel for Miss Rugg, witheringly denounced on that occasion up to the full amount of twenty guineas, at the rate of about eighteen-pence an epithet, and having been cast in corresponding damages, still suffered occasional persecution from the youth of Pentonville. But Miss Rugg, environed by the majesty of the law, and having her damages invested in the public securities, was regarded with consideration.

In the society of Mr. Rugg, who had a round white visage, as if all his blushes had been drawn out of him long ago, and who had a ragged yellow head like a worn-out hearth-broom; and in the society of Miss Rugg, who had little nankeen spots, like shirt buttons, all over her face, and whose own yellow tresses were rather scrubby than luxuriant; Mr. Pancks had usually dined on Sundays for some few years, and had twice a week, or so, enjoyed an evening collation of bread, Dutch cheese, and porter. Mr. Pancks was one of the very few marriageable men for whom Miss Rugg had no terrors, the argument with which he reassured himself being twofold; that is to say, firstly, "that it wouldn't do

twice," and secondly, "that he wasn't worth it." Fortified within this double armor, Mr. Pancks snorted at Miss Rugg on easy terms.

Up to this time Mr. Pancks had transacted little or no business at his quarters in Pentonville, except in the sleeping line; but, now that he had become a fortune-teller, he was often closeted after midnight with Mr. Rugg in his little front-parlor office, and, even after those untimely hours, burnt tallow in his bedroom. Though his duties as his proprietor's grubber were in no wise lessened; and though that service bore no greater resemblance to a bed of roses than was to be discovered in its many thorns; some new branch of industry made a constant demand upon him. When he cast off the Patriarch at night, it was only to take an anonymous craft in tow, and labor away afresh in other waters.

The advance from a personal acquaintance with the elder Mr. Chivery to an introduction to his amiable wife and disconsolate son may have been easy; but, easy or not, Mr. Pancks soon made it. He nestled in the bosom of the tobacco business within a week or two after his first appearance in the college, and particularly addressed himself to the cultivation of a good understanding with Young John. In this endeavor he so prospered as to lure that pining shepherd forth from the groves, and tempt him to undertake mysterious missions; on which he began to disappear at uncertain intervals for as long a space as two or three days together. The prudent Mrs. Chivery, who wondered greatly at this change, would have protested against it as detrimental to the Highland typification on the door-post, but for two forcible reasons; one, that her John was roused

to take strong interest in the business which these starts were supposed to advance — and this she held to be good for his drooping spirits; the other, that Mr. Pancks confidentially agreed to pay her, for the occupation of her son's time, at the handsome rate of seven and sixpence per day. The proposal originated with himself, and was couched in the pithy terms, "If your John is weak enough, ma'am, not to take it, that is no reason why you should be, don't you see? So, quite between ourselves, ma'am, business being business, here it is!"

What Mr. Chivery thought of these things, or how much or how little he knew about them, was never gathered from himself. It has been already remarked that he was a man of few words; and it may be here observed that he had imbibed a professional habit of locking everything up. He locked himself up as carefully as he locked up the Marshalsea debtors. Even his custom of bolting his meals may have been a part of a uniform whole; but there is no question that, as to all other purposes, he kept his mouth as he kept the Marshalsea door. He never opened it without occasion. When it was necessary to let anything out, he opened it a little way, held it open just as long as sufficed for the purpose, and locked it again. Even as he would be sparing of his trouble at the Marshalsea door, and would keep a visitor who wanted to go out waiting for a few moments if he saw another visitor coming down the yard, so that one turn of the key should suffice for both, similarly he would often reserve a remark if he perceived another on its way to his lips, and would deliver himself of the two together. As to any key

to his inner knowledge being to be found in his face, the Marshalsea key was as legible an index to the individual characters and histories upon which it was turned.

That Mr. Pancks should be moved to invite any one to dinner at Pentonville was an unprecedented fact in his calendar. But he invited Young John to dinner, and even brought him within range of the dangerous (because expensive) fascinations of Miss Rugg. The banquet was appointed for a Sunday, and Miss Rugg with her own hands stuffed a leg of mutton with oysters on the occasion, and sent it to the baker's — not *the* baker's, but an opposition establishment. Provision of oranges, apples, and nuts was also made. And rum was brought home by Mr. Pancks on Saturday night, to gladden the visitor's heart.

The store of creature comforts was not the chief part of the visitor's reception. Its special feature was a foregone family confidence and sympathy. When Young John appeared at half-past one, without the ivory hand and waistcoat of golden sprigs, the sun shorn of his beams by disastrous clouds, Mr. Pancks presented him to the yellow-haired Ruggs as the young man he had so often mentioned who loved Miss Dorrit.

"I am glad," said Mr. Rugg, challenging him specially in that character, "to have the distinguished gratification of making your acquaintance, sir. Your feelings do you honor. You are young; may you never outlive your feelings! If I was to outlive my own feelings, sir," said Mr. Rugg, who was a man of many words, and was considered to possess a remarkably good address; "if I was

to outlive my own feelings, I'd leave fifty pound in my will to the man who would put me out of existence."

Miss Rugg heaved a sigh.

"My daughter, sir," said Mr. Rugg. "Anastatia, you are no stranger to the state of this young man's affections. My daughter has had her trials, sir," — Mr. Rugg might have used the word more pointedly in the singular number, — "and she can feel for you."

Young John, almost overwhelmed by the touching nature of this greeting, professed himself to that effect.

"What I envy you, sir, is," said Mr. Rugg — "allow me to take your hat — we are rather short of pegs — I'll put it in the corner, nobody will tread in it there — what I envy you, sir, is the luxury of your own feelings. I belong to a profession in which that luxury is sometimes denied us."

Young John replied, with acknowledgments, that he only hoped he did what was right, and what showed how entirely he was devoted to Miss Dorrit. He wished to be unselfish; and he hoped he was. He wished to do anything as laid in his power to serve Miss Dorrit, altogether putting himself out of sight; and he hoped he did. It was but little that he could do, but he hoped he did it.

"Sir," said Mr. Rugg, taking him by the hand, "you are a young man that it does one good to come across. You are a young man that I should like to put in the witness-box, to humanize the minds of the legal profession. I hope you have brought your appetite with you, and intend to play a good knife and fork?"

"Thank you, sir," returned Young John, "I don't eat much at present."

Mr. Rugg drew him a little apart. "My daughter's case, sir," said he, "at the time when, in vindication of her outraged feelings and her sex, she became the plaintiff in Rugg and Hawkins. I suppose I could have put it in evidence, Mr. Chivery, if I had thought it worth my while, that the amount of solid sustenance my daughter consumed at that period did not exceed ten ounces per week."

"I think I go a little beyond that, sir," returned the other, hesitating, as if he confessed it with some shame.

"But in your case there's no fiend in human form," said Mr. Rugg with argumentative smile and action of hand. "Observe, Mr. Chivery! No fiend in human form!"

"No, sir, certainly," Young John added with simplicity, "I should be very sorry if there was."

"The sentiment," said Mr. Rugg, "is what I should have expected from your known principles. It would affect my daughter greatly, sir, if she heard it. As I perceive the mutton, I am glad she didn't hear it. Mr. Pancks, on this occasion, pray face me. My dear, face Mr. Chivery. For what we are going to receive, may we (and Miss Dorrit) be truly thankful!"

But for a grave waggishness in Mr. Rugg's manner of delivering this introduction to the feast, it might have appeared that Miss Dorrit was expected to be one of the company. Pancks recognized the sally in his usual way, and took in his provender in his usual way. Miss Rugg, perhaps making up

some of her arrears, likewise took very kindly to the mutton, and it rapidly diminished to the bone. A bread-and-butter pudding entirely disappeared, and a considerable amount of cheese and radishes vanished by the same means. Then came the dessert.

Then also, and before the broaching of the rum and water, came Mr. Pancks's note-book. The ensuing business proceedings were brief, but curious, and rather in the nature of a conspiracy. Mr. Pancks looked over his note-book, which was now getting full, studiously; and picked out little extracts, which he wrote on separate slips of paper on the table; Mr. Rugg, in the mean while, looking at him with close attention, and Young John losing his uncollected eye in mists of meditation. When Mr. Pancks, who supported the character of chief conspirator, had completed his extracts, he looked them over, corrected them, put up his note-book, and held them like a hand at cards.

"Now, there's a Churchyard in Bedfordshire," said Pancks. "Who takes it?"

"I'll take it, sir," returned Mr. Rugg, "if no one bids."

Mr. Pancks dealt him his card, and looked at his hand again.

"Now, there's an Inquiry in York," said Pancks. "Who takes it?"

"I'm not good for York," said Mr. Rugg.

"Then perhaps," pursued Pancks, "you'll be so obliging, John Chivery?"

Young John assenting, Pancks dealt him his card, and consulted his hand again.

"There's a Church in London; I may as well take that. And a Family Bible; I may as well take that, too. That's two to me. Two to me," repeated Pancks, breathing hard over his cards. "Here's a Clerk at Durham for you, John, and an old Seafaring Gentleman at Dunstable for you, Mr. Rugg. Two to me was it? Yes, two to me. Here's a Stone: three to me. And a Still-born Baby; four to me. And all, for the present, told."

When he had thus disposed of his cards, all being done very quietly and in a suppressed tone, Mr. Pancks puffed his way into his own breast-pocket, and tugged out a canvas bag; from which, with a sparing hand, he told forth money for travelling expenses in two little portions. "Cash goes out fast," he said anxiously, as he pushed a portion to each of his male companions, "very fast."

"I can only assure you, Mr. Pancks," said Young John, "that I deeply regret my circumstances being such that I can't afford to pay my own charges, or that it's not advisable to allow me the time necessary for my doing the distances on foot. Because nothing would give me greater satisfaction than to walk myself off my legs without fee or reward."

This young man's disinterestedness appeared so very ludicrous in the eyes of Miss Rugg, that she was obliged to effect a precipitate retirement from the company, and to sit upon the stairs until she had had her laugh out. Meanwhile, Mr. Pancks, looking, not without some pity, at Young John, slowly and thoughtfully twisted up his canvas bag as if he were wringing its neck. The lady, returning as he restored it to his pocket, mixed rum and water for the party, not forgetting her fair self, and

handed to every one his glass. When all were supplied, Mr. Rugg rose, and silently holding out his glass at arm's-length above the centre of the table, by that gesture invited the other three to add theirs, and to unite in a general conspiratorial clink. The ceremony was effective up to a certaln point, and would have been wholly so throughout, if Miss Rugg, as she raised her glass to her lips in completion of it, had not happened to look at Young John; when she was again so overcome by the contemptible comicality of his disinterestedness as to splutter some ambrosial drops of rum and water around, and withdraw in confusion.

Such was the dinner without precedent given by Pancks at Pentonville; and such was the busy and strange life Pancks led. The only waking moments at which he appeared to relax from his cares, and to recreate himself by going anywhere or saying anything without a pervading object, were when he showed a dawning interest in the lame foreigner with the stick, down Bleeding Heart Yard.

The foreigner, by name John Baptist Cavalletto — they called him Mr. Baptist in the Yard — was such a chirping, easy, hopeful little fellow, that his attraction for Pancks was probably in the force of contrast. Solitary, weak, and scantily acquainted with the most necessary words of the only language in which he could communicate with the people about him, he went with the stream of his fortunes, in a brisk way that was new in those parts. With little to eat, and less to drink, and nothing to wear but what he wore upon him, or had brought tied up in one of the smallest bundles that ever were seen, he put as bright a face upon it as if he were in the

most flourishing circumstances when he first hobbled up and down the Yard, humbly propitiating the general good-will with his white teeth.

It was uphill work for a foreigner, lame or sound, to make his way with the Bleeding Hearts. In the first place, they were vaguely persuaded that every foreigner had a knife about him; in the second, they held it to be a sound constitutional national axiom that he ought to go home to his own country. They never thought of inquiring how many of their own countrymen would be returned upon their hands from divers parts of the world, if the principle were generally recognized; they considered it practically and peculiarly British. In the third place, they had a notion that it was a sort of Divine visitation upon a foreigner that he was not an Englishman, and that all kinds of calamities happened to his country because it did things that England did not, and did not do things that England did. In this belief, to be sure, they had long been carefully trained by the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings, who were always proclaiming to them, officially and unofficially, that no country which failed to submit itself to those two large families could possibly hope to be under the protection of Providence; and who, when they believed it, disparaged them in private as the most prejudiced people under the sun.

This, therefore, might be called a political position of the Bleeding Hearts; but they entertained other objections to having foreigners in the Yard. They believed that foreigners were always badly off; and though they were as ill off themselves as they could desire to be, that did not diminish the force of the objection. They believed that foreigners were dra-

gooned and bayoneted; and though they certainly got their own skulls promptly fractured if they showed any ill-humor, still it was with a blunt instrument, and that didn't count. They believed that foreigners were always immoral; and though they had an occasional assize at home, and now and then a divorce case or so, that had nothing to do with it. They believed that foreigners had no independent spirit, as never being escorted to the poll in droves by Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle, with colors flying, and the tune of Rule Britannia playing. Not to be tedious, they had many other beliefs of a similar kind.

Against these obstacles the lame foreigner with the stick had to make head as well as he could; not absolutely single-handed, because Mr. Arthur Clennam had recommended him to the Plornishes (he lived at the top of the same house), but still at heavy odds. However, the Bleeding Hearts were kind hearts; and when they saw the little fellow cheerily limping about with a good-humored face, doing no harm, drawing no knives, committing no outrageous immoralities, living chiefly on farinaceous and milk diet, and playing with Mrs. Plornish's children of an evening, they began to think that although he could never hope to be an Englishman, still it would be hard to visit that affliction on his head. They began to accommodate themselves to his level, calling him "Mr. Baptist," but treating him like a baby, and laughing immoderately at his lively gestures and his childish English — more, because he didn't mind it, and laughed too. They spoke to him in very loud voices, as if he were stone deaf. They constructed sentences, by way of teaching him the language in

its purity, such as were addressed by the savages to Captain Cook, or by Friday to Robinson Crusoe. Mrs. Plornish was particularly ingenious in this art; and attained so much celebrity for saying, "Me ope you leg well soon," that it was considered in the Yard but a very short remove indeed from speaking Italian. Even Mrs. Plornish herself began to think that she had a natural call towards that language. As he became more popular, household objects were brought into requisition for his instruction in a copious vocabulary; and, whenever he appeared in the Yard, ladies would fly out at their doors crying, "Mr. Baptist — teapot!" "Mr. Baptist — dust-pan!" "Mr. Baptist—flour-dredger!" "Mr. Baptist —coffee-biggin!" At the same time exhibiting those articles, and penetrating him with a sense of the appalling difficulties of the Anglo-Saxon tongue.

It was in this stage of his progress, and in about the third week of his occupation, that Mr. Pancks's fancy became attracted by the little man. Mounting to his attic, attended by Mrs. Plornish as interpreter, he found Mr. Baptist with no furniture but his bed on the ground, a table, and a chair, carving, with the aid of a few simple tools, in the blithest way possible.

"Now, old chap," said Mr. Pancks, "pay up!"

He had his money ready, folded in a scrap of paper, and laughingly handed it in; then, with a free action, threw out as many fingers of his right hand as there were shillings, and made a cut crosswise in the air for an odd sixpence.

"Oh!" said Mr. Pancks, watching him wonderingly. "That's it, is it? You're a quick customer. It's all right. I didn't expect to receive it, though."

Mrs. Plornish here interposed with great condescension, and explained to Mr. Baptist, "E please. E glad get money."

The little man smiled and nodded. His bright face seemed uncommonly attractive to Mr. Pancks. "How's he getting on in his limb?" he asked Mrs. Plornish.

"Oh! he's a deal better, sir," said Mrs. Plornish. "We expect next week he'll be able to leave off his stick entirely." (The opportunity being too favorable to be lost, Mrs. Plornish displayed her great accomplishment by explaining, with pardonable pride, to Mr. Baptist, "E ope you leg well soon.")

"He's a merry fellow, too," said Mr. Pancks, admiring him as if he were a mechanical toy. "How does he live?"

"Why, sir," rejoined Mrs. Plornish, "he turns out to have quite a power of carving them flowers that you see him at now." (Mr. Baptist, watching their faces as they spoke, held up his work. Mrs. Plornish interpreted in her Italian manner, on behalf of Mr. Pancks, "E please. Double good!")

"Can he live by that?" asked Mr. Pancks.

"He can live on very little, sir, and it is expected as he will be able, in time, to make a very good living. Mr. Clennam got it him to do, and gives him odd jobs besides, in at the Works next door—makes 'em for him, in short, when he knows he wants 'em."

"And what does he do with himself, now, when he ain't hard at it?" said Mr. Pancks.

"Why, not much as yet, sir, on account, I suppose, of not being able to walk much; but he goes about the Yard, and he chats without particular

understanding or being understood, and he plays with the children, and he sits in the sun — he'll sit down anywhere, as if it was a arm-chair — and he'll sing and he'll laugh!"

"Laugh!" echoed Mr. Pancks. "He looks to me as if every tooth in his head was always laughing."

"But whenever he gets to the top of the steps at t'other end of the Yard," said Mrs. Plornish, "he'll peep out in the curiousest way! So that some of us thinks he's peeping out towards where his own country is, and some of us thinks he's looking for somebody he don't want to see, and some of us don't know what to think."

Mr. Baptist seemed to have a general understanding of what she said; or perhaps his quickness caught and applied her slight action of peeping. In any case, he closed his eyes and tossed his head with the air of a man who had his sufficient reasons for what he did, and said, in his own tongue, it didn't matter. Altro!

"What's Altro?" said Pancks.

"Hem! It's a sort of a general kind of expression, sir," said Mrs. Plornish.

"Is it?" said Pancks. "Why, then, Altro to you, old chap. Good-afternoon. Altro!"

Mr. Baptist in his vivacious way repeating the word several times, Mr. Pancks in his duller way gave it him back once. From that time it became a frequent custom with Pancks the gypsy, as he went home jaded at night, to pass round by Bleeding Heart Yard, go quietly up the stairs, look in at Mr. Baptist's door, and finding him in his room, to say, "Hallo, old chap! Altro!" To which Mr.

Baptist would reply, with innumerable bright nods and smiles, "Altro, signore, altro, altro, altro!" After this highly condensed conversation, Mr. Pancks would go his way, with an appearance of being lightened and refreshed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NOBODY'S STATE OF MIND.

If Arthur Clennam had not arrived at that wise decision firmly to restrain himself from loving Pet, he would have lived on in a state of much perplexity, involving difficult struggles with his own heart. Not the least of these would have been a contention, always waging within it, between a tendency to dislike Mr. Henry Gowan, if not to regard him with positive repugnance, and a whisper that the inclination was unworthy. A generous nature is not prone to strong aversions, and is slow to admit them even dispassionately; but when it finds ill-will gaining upon it, and can discern between-whiles that its origin is not dispassionate, such a nature becomes distressed.

Therefore Mr. Henry Gowan would have clouded Clennam's mind, and would have been far oftener present to it than more agreeable persons and subjects, but for the great prudence of his decision aforesaid. As it was, Mr. Gowan seemed transferred to Daniel Doyce's mind; at all events, it so happened that it usually fell to Mr. Doyce's turn, rather than to Clennam's, to speak of him in the friendly conversations they held together. These were of fre-

quent occurrence now; as the two partners shared a portion of a roomy house in one of the grave old-fashioned City streets, lying not far from the Bank of England, by London Wall.

Mr. Doyce had been to Twickenham to pass the day. Clennam had excused himself. Mr. Doyce was just come home. He put in his head at the door of Clennam's sitting-room to say Good-night.

"Come in, come in!" said Clennam.

"I saw you were reading," returned Doyce as he entered, "and thought you might not care to be disturbed."

But for the notable resolution he had made, Clennam really might not have known what he had been reading; really might not have had his eyes upon the book for an hour past, though it lay open before him. He shut it up rather quickly.

"Are they well?" he asked.

"Yes," said Doyce; "they are well. They are all well."

Daniel had an old workman-like habit of carrying his pocket-handkerchief in his hat. He took it out, and wiped his forehead with it, slowly repeating, "They are all well. Miss Minnie looking particularly well, I thought."

"Any company at the cottage?"

"No, no company."

"And how did you get on, you four?" asked Clennam gayly.

"There were five of us," returned his partner. "There was What's-his-name. He was there."

"Who is he?" said Clennam.

"Mr. Henry Gowan."

"Ah, to be sure!" cried Clennam with unusual vivacity. "Yes! I forgot him."

"As I mentioned, you may remember," said Daniel Doyce, "he is always there on Sunday."

"Yes, yes," returned Clennam; "I remember now."

Daniel Doyce, still wiping his forehead, ploddingly repeated, "Yes. He was there, he was there. Oh yes, he was there! And his dog. *He* was there too."

"Miss Meagles is quite attached to — the — dog," observed Clennam.

"Quite so," assented his partner. "More attached to the dog than I am to the man."

"You mean Mr." —

"I mean Mr. Gowan, most decidedly," said Daniel Doyce.

There was a gap in the conversation, which Clennam devoted to winding up his watch.

"Perhaps you are a little hasty in your judgment," he said. "Our judgments — I am supposing a general case" —

"Of course," said Doyce.

"— Are so liable to be influenced by many considerations, which, almost without our knowing it, are unfair, that it is necessary to keep a guard upon them. For instance, Mr." —

"Gowan," quietly said Doyce, upon whom the utterance of the name almost always devolved.

"— Is young and handsome, easy and quick, has talent, and has seen a good deal of various kinds of life. It might be difficult to give an unselfish reason for being prepossessed against him."

"Not difficult for me, I think, Clennam," returned his partner. "I see him bringing present anxiety, and, I fear, future sorrow, into my old friend's

house. I see him wearing deeper lines into my old friend's face, the nearer he draws to, and the oftener he looks at, the face of his daughter. In short, I see him with a net about the pretty and affectionate creature whom he will never make happy."

"We don't know," said Clennam, almost in the tone of a man in pain, "that he will not make her happy."

"We don't know," returned his partner, "that the earth will last another hundred years, but we think it highly probable."

"Well, well!" said Clennam, "we must be hopeful, and we must at least try to be, if not generous (which, in this case, we have no opportunity of being), just. We will not disparage this gentleman, because he is successful in his addresses to the beautiful object of his ambition; and we will not question her natural right to bestow her love on one whom she finds worthy of it."

"Maybe, my friend," said Doyce. "Maybe, also, that she is too young and petted, too confiding and inexperienced, to discriminate well."

"That," said Clennam, "would be far beyond our power of correction."

Daniel Doyce shook his head gravely, and rejoined, "I fear so."

"Therefore, in a word," said Clennam, "we should make up our minds that it is not worthy of us to say any ill of Mr. Gowan. It would be a poor thing to gratify a prejudice against him. And I resolve, for my part, not to depreciate him."

"I am not quite so sure of myself, and therefore I reserve my privilege of objecting to him," returned

the other. "But, if I am not sure of myself, I am sure of you, Clennam, and I know what an upright man you are, and how much to be respected. Good-night, my friend and partner!" He shook his hand in saying this, as if there had been something serious at the bottom of their conversation; and they separated.

By this time they had visited the family on several occasions, and had always observed that even a passing allusion to Mr. Henry Gowan, when he was not among them, brought back the cloud which had obscured Mr. Meagles's sunshine on the morning of the chance encounter at the ferry. If Clennam had ever admitted the forbidden passion into his breast, this period might have been a period of real trial; under the actual circumstances, doubtless, it was nothing — nothing.

Equally, if his heart had given entertainment to that prohibited guest, his silent fighting of his way through the mental condition of this period might have been a little meritorious. In the constant effort not to be betrayed into a new phase of the besetting sin of his experience, the pursuit of selfish objects by low and small means, and to hold instead to some high principle of honor and generosity, there might have been a little merit. In the resolution not even to avoid Mr. Meagles's house, lest, in the selfish sparing of himself, he should bring any slight distress upon the daughter through making her the cause of an estrangement which he believed the father would regret, there might have been a little merit. In the modest truthfulness of always keeping in view the greater equality of Mr. Gowan's years, and the greater attractions of his

person and manner, there might have been a little merit. In doing all this, and much more, in a perfectly unaffected way, and with a manful and composed constancy, while the pain within him (peculiar as his life and history) was very sharp, there might have been some quiet strength of character. But, after the resolution he had made, of course he could have no such merits as these; and such a state of mind was nobody's — nobody's.

Mr. Gowan made it no concern of his whether it was nobody's or somebody's. He preserved his perfect serenity of manner on all occasions, as if the possibility of Clennam's presuming to have debated the great question were too distant and ridiculous to be imagined. He had always an affability to bestow on Clennam, and an ease to treat him with, which might of itself (in the supposititious case of his not having taken that sagacious course) have been a very uncomfortable element in his state of mind.

"I quite regret that you were not with us yesterday," said Mr. Henry Gowan, calling on Clennam next morning. "We had an agreeable day up the river there."

So he had heard, Arthur said.

"From your partner?" returned Henry Gowan. "What a dear old fellow he is!"

"I have a great regard for him."

"By Jove, he is the finest creature!" said Gowan. "So fresh, so green, trusts in such wonderful things!"

Here was one of the many little rough points that had a tendency to grate on Clennam's hearing. He put it aside by merely repeating that he had a high regard for Mr. Doyce.

"He is charming! To see him mooning along to

that time of life, laying down nothing by the way and picking up nothing by the way, is delightful. It warms a man. So unspoilt, so simple, such a good soul! Upon my life, Mr. Clennam, one feels desperately worldly and wicked, in comparison with such an innocent creature. I speak for myself, let me add, without including you. You are genuine also."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Clennam, ill at ease; "you are too, I hope?"

"So-so," rejoined the other. "To be candid with you, tolerably. I am not a great impostor. Buy one of my pictures, and I assure you, in confidence, it will not be worth the money. Buy one of another man's — any great professor who beats me hollow — and the chances are that the more you give him, the more he'll impose upon you. They all do it."

"All painters?"

"Painters, writers, patriots, all the rest who have stands in the market. Give almost any man I know ten pounds, and he will impose upon you to a corresponding extent; a thousand pounds — to a corresponding extent; ten thousand pounds — to a corresponding extent. So great the success, so great the imposition. But what a capital world it is!" cried Gowan with warm enthusiasm. "What a jolly, excellent, lovable world it is!"

"I had rather thought," said Clennam, "that the principle you mention was chiefly acted on by" —

"By the Barnacles?" interrupted Gowan laughing.

"By the political gentlemen who condescend to keep the Circumlocution Office."

"Ah! Don't be hard upon the Barnacles," said Gowan, laughing afresh; "they are darling fellows!

Even poor little Clarence, the born idiot of the family, is the most agreeable and most endearing blockhead! And, by Jupiter, with a kind of cleverness in him, too, that would astonish you!"

"It would. Very much," said Clennam dryly.

"And after all," cried Gowan, with that characteristic balancing of his which reduced everything in the wide world to the same light weight, "though I can't deny that the Circumlocution Office may ultimately shipwreck everybody and everything, still, that will probably not be in our time — and it's a school for gentlemen."

"It's a very dangerous, unsatisfactory, and expensive school to the people who pay to keep the pupils there, I am afraid," said Clennam, shaking his head.

"Ah! You are a terrible fellow," returned Gowan airily. "I can understand how you have frightened that little donkey, Clarence, the most estimable of mooncalves (I really love him), nearly out of his wits. But enough of him, and of all the rest of them. I want to present you to my mother, Mr. Clennam. Pray do me the favor to give me the opportunity."

In nobody's state of mind, there was nothing Clennam would have desired less, or would have been more at a loss how to avoid.

"My mother lives in the most primitive manner down in that dreary red-brick dungeon at Hampton Court," said Gowan. "If you would make your own appointment, suggest your own day for permitting me to take you there to dinner, you would be bored, and she would be charmed. Really that's the state of the case."

What could Clennam say after this? His retiring

character included a great deal that was simple in the best sense, because unpractised and unused; and, in his simplicity and modesty, he could only say that he was happy to place himself at Mr. Gowan's disposal. Accordingly, he said it, and the day was fixed. And a dreaded day it was on his part, and a very unwelcome day when it came, and they went down to Hampton Court together.

The venerable inhabitants of that venerable pile seemed, in those times, to be encamped there like a sort of civilized gypsies. There was a temporary air about their establishments, as if they were going away the moment they could get anything better; there was also a dissatisfied air about themselves, as if they took it very ill that they had not already got something much better. Genteel blinds and makeshifts were more or less observable as soon as their doors were opened; screens not half high enough, which made dining-rooms out of arched passages, and warded off obscure corners where footboys slept at night, with their heads among the knives and forks; curtains which called upon you to believe that they didn't hide anything; panes of glass which requested you not to see them; many objects of various forms, feigning to have no connection with their guilty secret, a bed; disguised traps in walls, which were clearly coal-cellars; affectations of no thoroughfares, which were evidently doors to little kitchens. Mental reservations and artful mysteries grew out of these things. Callers, looking steadily into the eyes of their receivers, pretended not to smell cooking three feet off; people, confronting closets accidentally left open, pretended not to see bottles; visitors, with their heads against

a partition of thin canvas, and a page and a young female at high words on the other side, made believe to be sitting in a primeval silence. There was no end to the small social accommodation bills of this nature which the gypsies of gentility were constantly drawing upon, and accepting for, one another.

Some of these Bohemians were of an irritable temperament, as constantly soured and vexed by two mental trials: the first, the consciousness that they had never got enough out of the public; the second, the consciousness that the public were admitted into the building. Under the latter great wrong a few suffered dreadfully — particularly on Sundays, when they had for some time expected the earth to open and swallow the public up; but which desirable event had not yet occurred, in consequence of some reprehensible laxity in the arrangements of the Universe.

Mrs. Gowan's door was attended by a family servant of several years' standing, who had his own crow to pluck with the public, concerning a situation in the Post Office which he had been for some time expecting, and to which he was not yet appointed. He perfectly knew that the public could never have got him in, but he grimly gratified himself with the idea that the public kept him out. Under the influence of this injury (and perhaps of some little straitness and irregularity in the matter of wages), he had grown neglectful of his person and morose in mind; and now, beholding in Clennam one of the degraded body of his oppressors, received him with ignominy.

Mrs. Gowan, however, received him with conde-

scension. He found her a courtly old lady, formerly a Beauty, and still sufficiently well favored to have dispensed with the powder on her nose, and a certain impossible bloom under each eye. She was a little lofty with him: so was another old lady, dark-browed and high-nosed, and who must have had something real about her, or she could not have existed, but it was certainly not her hair, or her teeth, or her figure, or her complexion; so was a gray old gentleman of dignified and sullen appearance; both of whom had come to dinner. But, as they had all been in the British Embassy way in sundry parts of the earth, and as a British Embassy cannot better establish a character with the Circumlocution Office than by treating its compatriots with illimitable contempt (else it would become like the Embassies of other countries), Clennam felt that, on the whole, they let him off lightly.

The dignified old gentleman turned out to be Lord Lancaster Stiltstalking who had been maintained by the Circumlocution Office for many years as a representative of the Britannic Majesty abroad. This noble Refrigerator had iced several European courts in his time, and had done it with such complete success that the very name of Englishman yet struck cold to the stomachs of foreigners who had the distinguished honor of remembering him, at a distance of a quarter of a century.

He was now in retirement, and hence (in a ponderous white cravat, like a stiff snow-drift) was so obliging as to shade the dinner. There was a whisper of the pervading Bohemian character in the nomadic nature of the service, and its curious races of plates and dishes; but the noble Refrigerator,

infinitely better than plate or porcelain, made it superb. He shaded the dinner, cooled the wines, chilled the gravy, and blighted the vegetables.

There was only one other person in the room: a microscopically small footboy, who waited on the malevolent man who hadn't got into the Post Office. Even this youth, if his jacket could have been unbuttoned and his heart laid bare, would have been seen, as a distant adherent of the Barnacle family, already to aspire to a situation under Government.

Mrs. Gowan, with a gentle melancholy upon her, occasioned by her son's being reduced to court the swinish public as a follower of the low Arts, instead of asserting his birthright and putting a ring through its nose as an acknowledged Barnacle, headed the conversation at dinner on the evil days. It was then that Clennam learned for the first time what little pivots this great world goes round upon.

"If John Barnacle," said Mrs. Gowan, after the degeneracy of the times had been fully ascertained, "if John Barnacle had but abandoned his most unfortunate idea of conciliating the mob, all would have been well, and I think the country would have been preserved."

The old lady with the high nose assented, but added that if Augustus Stiltstalking had in a general way ordered the cavalry out, with instructions to charge, she thought the country would have been preserved.

The noble Refrigerator assented: but added that if William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, when they came over to one another and formed their ever-memorable coalition, had boldly muzzled the newspapers, and rendered it penal for any Editor-

person to presume to discuss the conduct of any appointed authority abroad or at home, he thought the country would have been preserved.

It was agreed that the country (another word for the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings) wanted preserving, but how it came to want preserving was not so clear. It was only clear that the question was all about John Barnacle, Augustus Stiltstalking, William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, Tom, Dick, or Harry Barnacle or Stiltstalking, because there was nobody else but mob. And this was the feature of the conversation which impressed Clennam, as a man not used to it, very disagreeably: making him doubt if it were quite right to sit there, silently hearing a great nation narrowed to such little bounds. Remembering, however, that in the Parliamentary debates, whether on the life of that nation's body or the life of its soul, the question was usually all about and between John Barnacle, Augustus Stiltstalking, William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, Tom, Dick, or Harry Barnacle or Stiltstalking, and nobody else, he said nothing on the part of mob, bethinking himself that mob was used to it.

Mr. Henry Gowan seemed to have a malicious pleasure in playing off the three talkers against each other, and in seeing Clennam startled by what they said. Having as supreme a contempt for the class that had thrown him off as for the class that had not taken him on, he had no personal disquiet in anything that passed. His healthy state of mind appeared even to derive a gratification from Clennam's position of embarrassment and isolation among the good company; and, if Clennam had

been in that condition with which Nobody was incessantly contending, he would have suspected it, and would have struggled with the suspicion as a meanness, even while he sat at the table.

In the course of a couple of hours the noble Refrigerator, at no time less than a hundred years behind the period, got about five centuries in arrear, and delivered solemn political oracles appropriate to that epoch. He finished by freezing a cup of tea for his own drinking, and retiring at his lowest temperature.

Then Mrs. Gowan, who had been accustomed in her days of state to retain a vacant arm-chair beside her to which to summon her devoted slaves, one by one, for short audiences as marks of her especial favor, invited Clennam with a turn of her fan to approach the presence. He obeyed, and took the tripod recently vacated by Lord Lancaster Stilt-stalking.

"Mr. Clennam," said Mrs. Gowan, "apart from the happiness I have in becoming known to you, though in this odiously inconvenient place — a mere barrack — there is a subject on which I am dying to speak to you. It is the subject in connection with which my son first had, I believe, the pleasure of cultivating your acquaintance."

Clennam inclined his head, as a generally suitable reply to what he did not yet quite understand.

"First," said Mrs. Gowan, "now is she really pretty?"

In nobody's difficulties, he would have found it very difficult to answer; very difficult indeed to smile, and say "Who?"

"Oh! You know!" she returned. "This flame

of Henry's. This unfortunate fancy. There! If it is a point of honor that I should originate the name — Miss Mickles — Miggles."

"Miss Meagles," said Clennam, "is very beautiful."

"Men are so often mistaken on those points," returned Mrs. Gowan, shaking her head, "that I candidly confess to you I feel anything but sure of it, even now; though it is something to have Henry corroborated with so much gravity and emphasis. He picked the people up at Rome, I think?"

The phrase would have given nobody mortal offence. Clennam replied, "Excuse me, I doubt if I understand your expression."

"Picked the people up," said Mrs. Gowan, tapping the sticks of her closed fan (a large green one, which she used as a hand-screen) upon her little table. "Came upon them. Found them out. Stumbled against them."

"The people?"

"Yes. The Miggles people."

"I really cannot say," said Clennam, "where my friend Mr. Meagles first presented Mr. Henry Gowan to his daughter."

"I am pretty sure he picked her up at Rome; but never mind where — somewhere. Now (this is entirely between ourselves) *is* she very plebeian?"

"Really, ma'am," returned Clennam, "I am so undoubtedly plebeian myself, that I do not feel qualified to judge."

"Very neat!" said Mrs. Gowan, coolly unfurling her screen. "Very happy! From which I infer that you secretly think her manner equal to her looks?"

Clennam, after a moment's stiffness, bowed.

"That's comforting, and I hope you may be right. Did Henry tell me you had travelled with them?"

"I travelled with my friend Mr. Meagles, and his wife and daughter, during some months." (Nobody's heart might have been wrung by the remembrance.)

"Really comforting, because you must have had a large experience of them. You see, Mr. Clennam, this thing has been going on for a long time, and I find no improvement in it. Therefore, to have the opportunity of speaking to one so well informed about it as yourself is an immense relief to me. Quite a boon. Quite a blessing, I am sure."

"Pardon me," returned Clennam, "but I am not in Mr. Henry Gowan's confidence. I am far from being so well informed as you suppose me to be. Your mistake makes my position a very delicate one. No word on this topic has ever passed between Mr. Henry Gowan and myself."

Mrs. Gowan glanced at the other end of the room, where her son was playing écarté on a sofa, with the old lady who was for a charge of cavalry.

"Not in his confidence? No," said Mrs. Gowan. "No word has passed between you? No. That I can imagine. But there are unexpressed confidences, Mr. Clennam; and, as you have been together intimately among these people, I cannot doubt that a confidence of that sort exists in the present case. Perhaps you have heard that I have suffered the keenest distress of mind from Henry's having taken to a pursuit which — well!" shrugging her shoulders, "a very respectable pursuit, I dare say, and some artists are, as artists, quite

superior persons; still, we never yet in our family have gone beyond an Amateur, and it is a pardonable weakness to feel a little" —

As Mrs. Gowan broke off to heave a sigh, Clennam, however resolute to be magnanimous, could not keep down the thought that there was mighty little danger of the family's ever going beyond an Amateur, even as it was.

"Henry," the mother resumed, "is self-willed and resolute; and, as these people naturally strain every nerve to catch him, I can entertain very little hope, Mr. Clennam, that the thing will be broken off. I apprehend the girl's fortune will be very small; Henry might have done much better; there is scarcely anything to compensate for the connection: still, he acts for himself; and, if I find no improvement within a short time, I see no other course than to resign myself, and make the best of these people. I am infinitely obliged to you for what you have told me."

As she shrugged her shoulders, Clennam stiffly bowed again. With an uneasy flush upon his face, and hesitation in his manner, he then said, in a still lower tone than he had adopted yet, —

"Mrs. Gowan, I scarcely know how to acquit myself of what I feel to be a duty, and yet I must ask you for your kind consideration in attempting to discharge it. A misconception on your part, a very great misconception, if I may venture to call it so, seems to require setting right. You have supposed Mr. Meagles and his family to strain every nerve, I think you said" —

"Every nerve," repeated Mrs. Gowan, looking at him in calm obstinacy, with her green fan between her face and the fire.

"—To secure Mr. Henry Gowan?"

The lady placidly assented.

"Now, that is so far," said Arthur, "from being the case, that I know Mr. Meagles to be unhappy in this matter; and to have interposed all reasonable obstacles, with the hope of putting an end to it."

Mrs. Gowan shut up her great green fan, tapped him on the arm with it, and tapped her smiling lips. "Why, of course," said she. "Just what I mean."

Arthur watched her face for some explanation of what she did mean.

"Are you really serious, Mr. Clennam? Don't you see?"

Arthur did not see; and said so.

"Why, don't I know my son, and don't I know that this is exactly the way to hold him?" said Mrs. Gowan contemptuously; "and do not these Miggles people know it at least as well as I? Oh, shrewd people, Mr. Clennam: evidently people of business! I believe Miggles belonged to a Bank. It ought to have been a very profitable Bank, if he had much to do with its management. This is very well done indeed."

"I beg and entreat you, ma'am"— Arthur interposed.

"Oh, Mr. Clennam! can you really be so credulous?"

It made such a painful impression upon him to hear her talking in this haughty tone, and to see her patting her contemptuous lips with her fan, that he said very earnestly, "Believe me, ma'am, this is unjust, a perfectly groundless suspicion."

"Suspicion!" repeated Mrs. Gowan. "Not sus-

picion, Mr. Clennam, Certainty. It is very knowingly done indeed, and seems to have taken *you* in completely." She laughed; and again sat tapping her lips with her fan, and tossing her head, as if she added, "Don't tell me. I know such people will do anything for the honor of such an alliance."

At this opportune moment the cards were thrown up, and Mr. Henry Gowan came across the room, saying, "Mother, if you can spare Mr. Clennam for this time, we have a long way to go, and it's getting late." Mr. Clennam thereupon rose, as he had no choice but to do; and Mrs. Gowan showed him, to the last, the same look and the same tapped contemptuous lips.

"You have had a portentously long audience of my mother," said Gowan as the door closed upon them. "I fervently hope she has not bored you?"

"Not at all," said Clennam.

They had a little open phaeton for the journey, and were soon in it on the road home. Gowan, driving, lighted a cigar; Clennam declined one. Do what he would, he fell into such a mood of abstraction, that Gowan said again, "I am very much afraid my mother has bored you?" To which he roused himself to answer, "Not at all;" and soon relapsed again.

In that state of mind which rendered nobody uneasy, his thoughtfulness would have turned principally on the man at his side. He would have thought of the morning when he first saw him rooting out the stones with his heel, and would have asked himself, "Does he jerk me out of the path in the same careless, cruel way?" He would have thought, had this introduction to his mother been

brought about by him because he knew what she would say, and that he could thus place his position before a rival, and loftily warn him off, without himself reposing a word of confidence in him? He would have thought, even if there were no such design as that, had he brought him there to play with his repressed emotions, and torment him? The current of these meditations would have been stayed sometimes by a rush of shame, bearing a remonstrance to himself from his own open nature, representing that to shelter such suspicions, even for the passing moment, was not to hold the high, unenvious course he had resolved to keep. At those times the striving within him would have been hardest; and, looking up and catching Gowan's eyes, he would have started as if he had done him an injury.

Then, looking at the dark road and its uncertain objects, he would have gradually trailed off again into thinking, "Where are we driving, he and I, I wonder, on the darker road of life? How will it be with us, and with her, in the obscure distance?" Thinking of her, he would have been troubled anew with a reproachful misgiving that it was not even loyal to her to dislike him, and that, in being so easily prejudiced against him, he was less deserving of her than at first.

"You are evidently out of spirits," said Gowan; "I am very much afraid my mother must have bored you dreadfully."

"Believe me, not at all," said Clennam. "It's nothing — nothing!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

FIVE AND TWENTY.

A FREQUENTLY recurring doubt, whether Mr. Pancks's desire to collect information relative to the Dorrit family could have any possible bearing on the misgivings he had imparted to his mother on his return from his long exile, caused Arthur Clennam much uneasiness at this period. What Mr. Pancks already knew about the Dorrit family, what more he really wanted to find out, and why he should trouble his busy head about them at all, were questions that often perplexed him. Mr. Pancks was not a man to waste his time and trouble in researches prompted by idle curiosity. That he had a specific object Clennam could not doubt. And whether the attainment of that object by Mr. Pancks's industry might bring to light, in some untimely way, secret reasons which had induced his mother to take Little Dorrit by the hand, was a serious speculation.

Not that he ever wavered either in his desire or his determination to repair a wrong that had been done in his father's time, should a wrong come to light, and be reparable. The shadow of a supposed act of injustice, which had hung over him since his father's death. was so vague and formless that it

might be the result of a reality widely remote from his idea of it. But, if his apprehensions should prove to be well founded, he was ready at any moment to lay down all he had, and begin the world anew. As the fierce dark teaching of his childhood had never sunk into his heart, so the first article in his code of morals was, that he must begin in practical humility, with looking well to his feet on Earth, and that he could never mount on wings of words to Heaven. Duty on earth, restitution on earth, action on earth: these first, as the first steep steps upward. Strait was the gate, and narrow was the way; far straiter and narrower than the broad high-road paved with vain professions and vain repetitions, motes from other men's eyes and liberal delivery of others to the judgment—all cheap materials, costing absolutely nothing.

No. It was not a selfish fear or hesitation that rendered him uneasy, but a mistrust lest Pancks might not observe his part of the understanding between them, and, making any discovery, might take some course upon it without imparting it to him. On the other hand, when he recalled his conversation with Pancks, and the little reason he had to suppose that there was any likelihood of that strange personage being on that track at all, there were times when he wondered that he made so much of it. Laboring in this sea, as all barks labor in cross-seas, he tossed about, and came to no haven.

The removal of Little Dorrit herself from their customary association did not mend the matter. She was so much out, and so much in her own room, that he began to miss her, and to find a blank in her place. He had written to her to inquire if she were

better, and she had written back, very gratefully and earnestly, telling him not to be uneasy on her behalf, for she was quite well; but he had not seen her for what, in their intercourse, was a long time.

He returned home one evening from an interview with her father, who had mentioned that she was out visiting — which was what he always said when she was hard at work to buy his supper — and found Mr. Meagles in an excited state walking up and down his room. On his opening the door, Mr. Meagles stopped, faced round, and said, —

"Clennam! — Tattycoram!"

"What's the matter?"

"Lost!"

"Why, bless my heart alive," cried Clennam in amazement. "What do you mean?"

"Wouldn't count five and twenty, sir; couldn't be got to do it; stopped at eight, and took herself off."

"Left your house?"

"Never to come back," said Mr. Meagles, shaking his head. "You don't know that girl's passionate and proud character. A team of horses couldn't draw her back now; the bolts and bars of the old Bastille couldn't keep her."

"How did it happen? Pray sit down and tell me."

"As to how it happened, it's not so easy to relate; because you must have the unfortunate temperament of the poor impetuous girl herself, before you can fully understand it. But it came about in this way. Pet and Mother and I have been having a good deal of talk together of late. I'll not disguise it from you, Clennam, that those conversations have not

been of as bright a kind as I could wish; they have referred to our going away again. In proposing to do which, I have had, in fact, an object."

Nobody's heart beat quickly.

"An object," said Mr. Meagles after a moment's pause, "that I will not disguise from you either, Clennam. There's an inclination on the part of my dear child which I am sorry for. Perhaps you guess the person. Henry Gowan."

"I was not unprepared to hear it."

"Well!" said Mr. Meagles with a heavy sigh, "I wish to God you had never had to hear it. However, so it is. Mother and I have done all we could to get the better of it, Clennam. We have tried tender advice, we have tried time, we have tried absence. As yet, of no use. Our late conversations have been upon the subject of going away for another year at least, in order that there might be an entire separation and breaking off for that term. Upon that question Pet has been unhappy, and therefore Mother and I have been unhappy."

Clennam said that he could easily believe it.

"Well!" continued Mr. Meagles in an apologetic way, "I admit as a practical man, and I am sure Mother would admit as a practical woman, that we do, in families, magnify our troubles and make mountains of our molehills, in a way that is calculated to be rather trying to people who look on — to mere outsiders, you know, Clennam. Still, Pet's happiness or unhappiness is quite a life or death question with us; and we may be excused, I hope, for making much of it. At all events, it might have been borne by Tattycoram. Now, don't you think so?"

"I do indeed think so," returned Clennam, in most emphatic recognition of this very moderate expectation.

"No, sir," said Mr. Meagles, shaking his head ruefully. "She couldn't stand it. The chafing and firing of that girl, the wearing and tearing of that girl within her own breast, has been such that I have softly said to her again and again, in passing her, 'Five and twenty, Tattycoram, five and twenty!' I heartily wish she could have gone on counting five and twenty day and night, and then it wouldn't have happened."

Mr. Meagles, with a despondent countenance in which the goodness of his heart was even more expressed than in his times of cheerfulness and gayety, stroked his face down from his forehead to his chin, and shook his head again.

"I said to Mother (not that it was necessary, for she would have thought it all for herself), we are practical people, my dear, and we know her story; we see, in this unhappy girl, some reflection of what was raging in her mother's heart before ever such a creature as this poor thing was in the world; we'll gloss her temper over, Mother, we won't notice it at present, my dear, we'll take advantage of some better disposition in her another time. So we said nothing. But do what we would, it seems as if it was to be; she broke out violently one night."

"How, and why?"

"If you ask me Why," said Mr. Meagles, a little disturbed by the question, for he was far more intent on softening her case than the family's, "I can only refer you to what I have just repeated as

having been pretty near my words to Mother. As to How, we had said good-night to Pet in her presence (very affectionately, I must allow), and she had attended Pet up-stairs — you remember she was her maid. Perhaps Pet, having been out of sorts, may have been a little more inconsiderate than usual in requiring services of her; but I don't know that I have any right to say so; she was always thoughtful and gentle."

"The gentlest mistress in the world."

"Thank you, Clennam," said Mr. Meagles, shaking him by the hand; "you have often seen them together. Well! We presently heard this unfortunate Tattycoram loud and angry, and before we could ask what was the matter, Pet came back in a tremble, saying she was frightened of her. Close after her came Tattycoram in a flaming rage. 'I hate you all three,' says she, stamping her foot at us. 'I am bursting with hate of the whole house.'"

"Upon which you?" —

"I?" said Mr. Meagles with a plain good faith that might have commanded the belief of Mrs. Gowan herself; "I said, count five and twenty, Tattycoram."

Mr. Meagles again stroked his face and shook his head with an air of profound regret.

"She was so used to do it, Clennam, that even then, such a picture of passion as you never saw, she stopped short, looked me full in the face, and counted (as I made out) to eight. But she couldn't control herself to go any further. Then she broke down, poor thing, and gave the other seventeen to the four winds. Then it all burst out. She de-

tested us, she was miserable with us, she couldn't bear it, she wouldn't bear it, she was determined to go away. She was younger than her young mistress, and would she remain to see *her* always held up as the only creature who was young and interesting, and to be cherished and loved? No. She wouldn't, she wouldn't, she wouldn't. What did we think she, Tattycoram, might have been if she had been caressed and cared for in her childhood like her young mistress? As good as her? Ah! Perhaps fifty times as good. When we pretended to be so fond of one another, we exulted over her; that was what we did; we exulted over her, and shamed her. And all in the house did the same. They talked about their fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters; they liked to drag them up before her face. There was Mrs. Tickit, only yesterday, when her little grandchild was with her, had been amused by the child's trying to call her (Tattycoram) by the wretched name we gave her, and had laughed at the name. Why, who didn't; and who were we that we should have a right to name her like a dog or a cat? But, she didn't care. She would take no more benefits from us; she would fling us her name back again, and she would go. She would leave us that minute, nobody should stop her, and we should never hear of her again."

Mr. Meagles had recited all this with such a vivid remembrance of his original, that he was almost as flushed and hot by this time as he described her to have been.

"Ah, well!" he said, wiping his face. "It was of no use trying reason then, with that vehement panting creature (Heaven knows what her mother's

story must have been); so I quietly told her that she should not go at that late hour of night, and I gave her my hand and took her to her room, and locked the house-doors. But she was gone this morning."

"And you know no more of her?"

"No more," returned Mr. Meagles. "I have been hunting about all day. She must have gone very early and very silently. I have found no trace of her down about us."

"Stay! You want," said Clennam after a moment's reflection, "to see her. I assume that?"

"Yes, assuredly; I want to give her another chance; Mother and Pet want to give her another chance; come! You yourself," said Mr. Meagles persuasively, as if the provocation to be angry were not his own at all, "want to give the poor passionate girl another chance, I know, Clennam."

"It would be strange and hard indeed if I did not," said Clennam, "when you are all so forgiving. What I was going to ask you was, have you thought of that Miss Wade?"

"I have. I did not think of her until I had pervaded the whole of our neighborhood, and I don't know that I should have done so then, but for finding Mother and Pet, when I went home, full of the idea that Tattycoram must have gone to her. Then, of course, I recalled what she said that day at dinner when you were first with us."

"Have you any idea where Miss Wade is to be found?"

"To tell you the truth," returned Mr. Meagles, "it's because I have an addled jumble of a notion on that subject that you found me waiting here.

There is one of those odd impressions in my house which do mysteriously get into houses sometimes, which nobody seems to have picked up in a distinct form from anybody, and yet which everybody seems to have got hold of loosely from somebody, and let go again, that she lives, or was living, thereabouts." Mr. Meagles handed him a slip of paper, on which was written the name of one of the dull by-streets in the Grosvenor region, near Park Lane.

"Here is no number," said Arthur, looking over it.

"No number, my dear Clennam?" returned his friend. "No anything! The very name of the street may have been floating in the air, for, as I tell you, none of my people can say where they got it from. However, it's worth an inquiry; and as I would rather make it in company than alone, and as you too were a fellow-traveller of that immovable woman's, I thought perhaps"— Clennam finished the sentence for him by taking up his hat again, and saying he was ready.

It was now summer-time; a gray, hot, dusty evening. They rode to the top of Oxford Street, and there alighting, dived in among the great streets of melancholy stateliness, and the little streets that try to be as stately, and succeed in being more melancholy, of which there is a labyrinth near Park Lane. Wildernesses of corner houses, with barbarous old porticos and appurtenances; horrors that came into existence under some wrong-headed person in some wrong-headed time, still demanding the blind admiration of all ensuing generations, and determined to do so until they tumbled down; frowned upon the twilight. Para-

site little tenements with the cramp in their whole frame, from the dwarf hall-door on the giant model of his Grace's in the Square, to the squeezed window of the boudoir commanding the dunghills in the Mews, made the evening doleful. Rickety dwellings of undoubted fashion, but of a capacity to hold nothing comfortably except a dismal smell, looked like the last result of the great mansion's breeding in-and-in; and, where their little supplementary bows and balconies were supported on thin iron columns, seemed to be scrofulously resting upon crutches. Here and there a Hatchment, with the whole science of Heraldry in it, loomed down upon the street, like an Archbishop discoursing on Vanity. The shops, few in number, made no show; for popular opinion was as nothing to them. The pastry-cook knew who was on his books, and in that knowledge could be calm, with a few glass cylinders of dowager peppermint drops in his window, and half a dozen ancient specimens of currant jelly. A few oranges formed the green-grocer's whole concession to the vulgar mind. A single basket made of moss, once containing plover's eggs, held all that the poulterer had to say to the rabble. Everybody in those streets seemed (which is always the case at that hour and season) to be gone out to dinner, and nobody seemed to be giving the dinners they had gone to. On the doorsteps there were lounging footmen with bright party-colored plumage and white polls, like an extinct race of monstrous birds; and butlers, solitary men of recluse demeanor, each of whom appeared distrustful of all other butlers. The roll of carriages in the Park was done for the day; the street-lamps were lighting; and wicked

little grooms in the tightest-fitting garments, with twists in their legs answering to the twists in their minds, hung about in pairs, chewing straws and exchanging fraudulent secrets. The spotted dogs who went out with the carriages, and who were so associated with splendid equipages, that it looked like a condescension in those animals to come out without them, accompanied helpers to and fro on messages. Here and there was a retiring public-house which did not require to be supported on the shoulders of the people, and where gentlemen out of livery were not much wanted.

This last discovery was made by the two friends in pursuing their inquiries. Nothing was there, or anywhere, known of such a person as Miss Wade in connection with the street they sought. It was one of the parasite streets; long, regular, narrow, dull, and gloomy; like a brick-and-mortar funeral. They inquired at several little area gates, where a dejected youth stood spiking his chin on the summit of a precipitous little shoot of wooden steps, but could gain no information. They walked up the street on one side of the way, and down it on the other, what time two vociferous news-sellers, announcing an extraordinary event that had never happened and never would happen, pitched their hoarse voices into the secret chambers; but nothing came of it. At length they stood at the corner from which they had begun, and it had fallen quite dark, and they were no wiser.

It happened that in the street they had several times passed a dingy house, apparently empty, with bills in the windows, announcing that it was to let. The bills, as a variety in the funeral procession,

almost amounted to a decoration. Perhaps because they kept the house separate in his mind, or perhaps because Mr. Meagles and himself had twice agreed in passing, "It is clear she don't live there," Clennam now proposed that they should go back and try that house before finally going away. Mr. Meagles agreed, and back they went.

They knocked once, and they rang once, without any response. "Empty," said Mr. Meagles, listening. "Once more," said Clennam, and knocked again. After that knock they heard a movement below, and somebody shuffling up towards the door.

The confined entrance was so dark, that it was impossible to make out distinctly what kind of person opened the door; but it appeared to be an old woman. "Excuse our troubling you," said Clennam. "Pray can you tell us where Miss Wade lives?" The voice in the darkness unexpectedly replied, "Lives here."

"Is she at home?"

No answer coming, Mr. Meagles asked again, "Pray is she at home?"

After another delay, "I suppose she is," said the voice abruptly; "you had better come in, and I'll ask."

They were summarily shut into the close black house; and the figure rustling away, and speaking from a higher level, said, "Come up if you please; you can't tumble over anything." They groped their way up-stairs towards a faint light, which proved to be the light of the street shining through a window; and the figure left them shut up in an airless room.

"This is odd, Clennam," said Mr. Meagles softly.

"Odd enough," assented Clennam in the same tone, "but we have succeeded; that's the main point. Here's a light coming!"

The light was a lamp, and the bearer was an old woman: very dirty, very wrinkled and dry. "She's at home," she said (and the voice was the same that had spoken before); "she'll come directly." Having set the lamp down on the table, the old woman dusted her hands on her apron, which she might have done forever without cleaning them, looked at the visitors with a dim pair of eyes, and backed out.

The lady whom they had come to see, if she were the present occupant of the house, appeared to have taken up her quarters there, as she might have established herself in an Eastern caravanserai. A small square of carpet in the middle of the room, a few articles of furniture that evidently did not belong to the room, and a disorder of trunks and travelling articles, formed the whole of her surroundings. Under some former regular inhabitant, the stifling little apartment had broken out into a pier-glass and a gilt table; but the gilding was as faded as last year's flowers, and the glass was so clouded that it seemed to hold in magic preservation all the fogs and bad weather it had ever reflected. The visitors had had a minute or two to look about them, when the door opened, and Miss Wade came in.

She was exactly the same as when they had parted. Just as handsome, just as scornful, just as repressed. She manifested no surprise in seeing them, nor any other emotion. She requested them to be seated; and, declining to take a seat herself, at once anticipated any introduction of their business.

"I apprehend," she said, "that I know the cause of your favoring me with this visit. We may come to it at once."

"The cause, then, ma'am," said Mr. Meagles, "is Tattycoram."

"So I supposed."

"Miss Wade," said Mr. Meagles, "will you be so kind as to say whether you know anything of her?"

"Surely. I know she is here with me."

"Then, ma'am," said Mr. Meagles, "allow me to make known to you that I shall be happy to have her back, and that my wife and daughter will be happy to have her back. She has been with us a long time, we don't forget her claims upon us, and I hope we know how to make allowances."

"You hope you know how to make allowances?" she returned in a level, measured voice. "For what?"

"I think my friend would say, Miss Wade," Arthur Clennam interposed, seeing Mr. Meagles rather at a loss, "for the passionate sense that sometimes comes upon the poor girl of being at a disadvantage. Which occasionally gets the better of better remembrances."

The lady broke into a smile as she turned her eyes upon him. "Indeed!" was all she answered.

She stood by the table so perfectly composed and still after this acknowledgment of his remark, that Mr. Meagles stared at her under a sort of fascination, and could not even look to Clennam to make another move. After waiting, awkwardly enough, for some moments, Arthur said, —

"Perhaps it would be well if Mr. Meagles could see her, Miss Wade?"

"That is easily done," said she. "Come here. child." She had opened a door while saying this, and now led the girl in by the hand. It was very curious to see them standing together: the girl with her disengaged fingers plaiting the bosom of her dress half irresolutely, half passionately; Miss Wade with her composed face attentively regarding her, and suggesting to an observer with extraordinary force, in her composure itself (as a veil will suggest the form it covers), the unquenchable passion of her own nature.

"See here," she said in the same level way as before. "Here is your patron, your master. He is willing to take you back, my dear, if you are sensible of the favor, and choose to go. You can be, again, a foil to his pretty daughter, a slave to her pleasant wilfulness, and a toy in the house showing the goodness of the family. You can have your droll name again, playfully pointing you out and setting you apart, as it is right that you should be pointed out and set apart. (Your birth, you know; you must not forget your birth.) You can again be shown to this gentleman's daughter, Harriet, and kept before her as a living reminder of her own superiority and her gracious condescension. You can recover all these advantages, and many more of the same kind which I dare say start up in your memory while I speak, and which you lose in taking refuge with me — you can recover them all, by telling these gentlemen how humbled and penitent you are, and by going back with them to be forgiven. What do you say, Harriet? Will you go?"

The girl who under the influence of these words, had gradually risen in anger and heightened in color,

answered, raising her lustrous black eyes for the moment, and clinching her hand upon the folds it had been puckering up, "I'd die sooner!"

Miss Wade, still standing at her side holding her hand, looked quietly round, and said with a smile, "Gentlemen! What do you do upon that?"

Poor Mr. Meagles's inexpressible consternation in hearing his motives and actions so perverted had prevented him from interposing any word until now; but now he regained the power of speech.

"Tattycoram," said he, "for I'll call you by that name still, my good girl, conscious that I meant nothing but kindness when I gave it to you, and conscious that you know it" —

"I don't!" said she, looking up again, and almost rending herself with the same busy hand.

"No, not now, perhaps," said Mr. Meagles, "not with that lady's eyes so intent upon you, Tattycoram," she glanced at them for a moment, "and that power over you which we see she exercises; not now, perhaps, but at another time. Tattycoram, I'll not ask that lady whether she believes what she has said, even in the anger and ill blood in which I and my friend here equally know she has spoken, though she subdues herself with a determination that any one who has once seen her is not likely to forget. I'll not ask you, with your remembrance of my house and all belonging to it, whether you believe it. I'll only say that you have no profession to make to me or mine, and no forgiveness to entreat; and that all in the world that I ask you to do is to count five and twenty, Tattycoram."

She looked at him for an instant, and then said frowningly, "I won't. Miss Wade, take me away, please."

The contention that raged within her had no softening in it now; it was wholly between passionate defiance and stubborn defiance. Her rich color, her quick blood, her rapid breath, were all setting themselves against the opportunity of retracing her steps. "I won't! I won't! I won't!" she repeated in a low, thick voice. "I'd be torn to pieces first. I'd tear myself to pieces first!"

Miss Wade, who had released her hold, laid her hand protectingly on the girl's neck for a moment, and then said, looking round with her former smile, and speaking exactly in her former tone, "Gentlemen! What do you do upon that?"

"Oh, Tattycoram, Tattycoram!" cried Mr. Meagles, adjuring her besides with an earnest hand. "Hear that lady's voice, look at that lady's face, consider what is in that lady's heart, and think what a future lies before you. My child, whatever you may think, that lady's influence over you — astonishing to us, and I should hardly go too far in saying terrible to us, to see — is founded in passion fiercer than yours, and temper more violent than yours. What can you two be together? What can come of it?"

"I am alone here, gentlemen," observed Miss Wade, with no change of voice or manner. "Say anything you will."

"Politeness must yield to this misguided girl, ma'am," said Mr. Meagles, "at her present pass; though I hope not altogether to dismiss it, even with the injury you do her so strongly before me. Excuse me for reminding you in her hearing — I must say it — that you were a mystery to all of us, and had nothing in common with any of us, when she unfortunately fell in your way. I don't know what

you are, but you don't hide, can't hide, what a dark spirit you have within you. If it should happen that you are a woman who, from whatever cause, has a perverted delight in making a sister-woman as wretched as she is (I am old enough to have heard of such), I warn her against you, and I warn you against yourself."

"Gentlemen!" said Miss Wade calmly. "When you have concluded — Mr. Clennam, perhaps you will induce your friend" —

"Not without another effort," said Mr. Meagles stoutly. "Tattycoram, my poor dear girl, count five and twenty!"

"Do not reject the hope, the certainty, this kind man offers you," said Clennam in a low emphatic voice. "Turn to the friends you have not forgotten. Think once more!"

"I won't! Miss Wade," said the girl, with her bosom swelling high, and speaking with her hand held to her throat, "take me away!"

"Tattycoram!" said Mr. Meagles. "Once more yet! The only thing I ask of you in the world, my child! Count five and twenty!"

She put her hands tightly over her ears, confusedly tumbling down her bright black hair in the vehemence of the action, and turned her face resolutely to the wall. Miss Wade, who had watched her under this final appeal with that strange attentive smile, and that repressing hand upon her own bosom, with which she had watched her in her struggle at Marseilles, then put her arm about her waist as if she took possession of her forevermore.

And there was a visible triumph in her face when she turned it to dismiss the visitors.

"As it is the last time I shall have this honor," she said, "and as you have spoken of not knowing what I am, and also of the foundation of my influence here, you may know now that it is founded in a common cause. What your broken plaything is, as to birth, I am. She has no name, I have no name. Her wrong is my wrong. I have nothing more to say to you."

This was addressed to Mr. Meagles, who sorrowfully went out. As Clennam followed, she said to him, with the same external composure and in the same level voice, but with a smile that is only seen on cruel faces: a very faint smile, lifting the nostril, scarcely touching the lips, and not breaking away gradually, but instantly dismissed when done with:

"I hope the wife of your dear friend, Mr. Gowan, may be happy in the contrast of her extraction to this girl's and mine, and in the high good fortune that awaits her."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NOBODY'S DISAPPEARANCE.

Not resting satisfied with the endeavors he had made to recover his lost charge, Mr. Meagles addressed a letter of remonstrance, breathing nothing but good-will, not only to her, but to Miss Wade too. No answer coming to these epistles, or to another written to the stubborn girl by the hand of her late young mistress, which might have melted her if anything could (all three letters were returned weeks afterwards as having been refused at the house-door), he deputed Mrs. Meagles to make the experiment of a personal interview. That worthy lady being unable to obtain one, and being steadfastly denied admission, Mr. Meagles besought Arthur to essay once more what he could do. All that came of his compliance was, his discovery that the empty house was left in charge of the old woman, that Miss Wade was gone, that the waifs and strays of furniture were gone, and that the old woman would accept any number of half-crowns, and thank the donor kindly, but had no information whatever to exchange for those coins, beyond constantly offering for perusal a memorandum relative to fixtures, which the house agent's young man had left in the hall.

Unwilling, even under this discomfiture, to resign the ingrate and leave her hopeless, in case of her better disposition obtaining the mastery over the darker side of her character, Mr. Meagles, for six successive days, published a discreetly covert advertisement in the morning papers, to the effect that if a certain young person who had lately left home without reflection would at any time apply at his address at Twickenham, everything would be as it had been before, and no reproaches need be apprehended. The unexpected consequences of this notification suggested to the dismayed Mr. Meagles, for the first time, that some hundreds of young persons must be leaving their homes without reflection every day; for shoals of wrong young people came down to Twickenham, who, not finding themselves received with enthusiasm, generally demanded compensation by way of damages, in addition to coach-hire there and back. Nor were these the only uninvited clients whom the advertisement produced. The swarm of begging-letter writers who would seem to be always watching eagerly for any hook, however small, to hang a letter upon, wrote to say that, having seen the advertisement, they were induced to apply with confidence for various sums, ranging from ten shillings to fifty pounds: not because they knew anything about the young person, but because they felt that to part with those donations would greatly relieve the advertiser's mind. Several projectors, likewise, availed themselves of the same opportunity to correspond with Mr. Meagles; as, for example, to apprise him that their attention having been called to the advertisement by a friend, they begged to state that if they

should ever hear anything of the young person, they would not fail to make it known to him immediately, and that in the mean time, if he would oblige them with the funds necessary for bringing to perfection a certain entirely novel description of Pump, the happiest results would ensue to mankind.

Mr. Meagles and his family, under these combined discouragements, had begun reluctantly to give up Tattycoram as irrecoverable, when the new and active firm of Doyce and Clennam, in their private capacities, went down on a Saturday to stay at the cottage until Monday. The senior partner took the coach, and the junior partner took his walking-stick.

A tranquil summer sunset shone upon him as he approached the end of his walk, and passed through the meadows by the river-side. He had that sense of peace, and of being lightened of a weight of care, which country quiet awakens in the breasts of dwellers in towns. Everything within his view was lovely and placid. The rich foliage of the trees, the luxuriant grass diversified with wild flowers, the little green islands in the river, the beds of rushes, the water-lilies floating on the surface of the stream, the distant voices in boats borne musically towards him on the ripple of the water and the evening air, were all expressive of rest. In the occasional leap of a fish, or dip of an oar, or twittering of a bird not yet at roost, or distant barking of a dog, or lowing of a cow — in all such sounds there was the prevailing breath of rest, which seemed to encompass him in every scent that sweetened the fragrant air. The long lines of red and gold in the sky, and the glorious track of the descending sun,

were all divinely calm. Upon the purple tree-tops far away, and on the green height near at hand up which the shades were slowly creeping, there was an equal hush. Between the real landscape and its shadow in the water there was no division; both were so untroubled and clear, and, while so fraught with solemn mystery of life and death, so hopefully reassuring to the gazer's soothed heart, because so tenderly and mercifully beautiful.

Clennam had stopped, not for the first time by many times, to look about him and suffer what he saw to sink into his soul, as the shadows, looked at, seemed to sink deeper and deeper into the water. He was slowly resuming his way, when he saw a figure in the path before him which he had, perhaps, already associated with the evening and its impressions.

Minnie was there alone. She had some roses in her hand, and seemed to have stood still on seeing him, waiting for him. Her face was towards him, and she appeared to have been coming from the opposite direction. There was a flutter in her manner, which Clennam had never seen in it before; and, as he came near her, it entered his mind all at once that she was there of a set purpose to speak to him.

She gave him her hand, and said, "You wonder to see me here by myself? But the evening is so lovely, I have strolled further than I meant at first. I thought it likely I might meet you, and that made me more confident. You always come this way, do you not?"

As Clennam said that it was his favorite way, he felt her hand falter on his arm, and saw the roses shake.

"Will you let me give you one, Mr. Clennam? I gathered them as I came out of the garden. Indeed, I almost gathered them for you, thinking it so likely I might meet you. Mr. Doyce arrived more than an hour ago, and told us you were walking down."

His own hand shook as he accepted a rose or two from hers, and thanked her. They were now by an avenue of trees. Whether they turned into it on his movement or on hers matters little. He never knew how that was.

"It is very grave here," said Clennam, "but very pleasant at this hour. Passing along this deep shade, and out at that arch of light at the other end, we come upon the ferry and the cottage by the best approach, I think."

In her simple garden hat and her light summer dress, with her rich brown hair naturally clustering about her, and her wonderful eyes raised to his for a moment, with a look in which regard for him and trustfulness in him were strikingly blended with a kind of timid sorrow for him, she was so beautiful, that it was well for his peace — or ill for his peace. he did not quite know which — that he had made that vigorous resolution he had so often thought about.

She broke a momentary silence by inquiring if he knew that papa had been thinking of another tour abroad? He said he had heard it mentioned. She broke another momentary silence by adding, with some hesitation, that papa had abandoned the idea.

At this he thought directly, "They are to be married."

"Mr. Clennam!" she said, hesitating more timidly yet, and speaking so low that he bent his head

to hear her. "I should very much like to give you my confidence, if you would not mind having the goodness to receive it. I should have very much liked to have given it to you long ago, because — I felt that you were becoming so much our friend."

"How can I be otherwise than proud of it at any time? Pray give it to me. Pray trust me."

"I could never have been afraid of trusting you," she returned, raising her eyes frankly to his face. "I think I would have done so some time ago, if I had known how. But I scarcely know how, even now."

"Mr. Gowan," said Arthur Clennam, "has reason to be very happy. God bless his wife and him!"

She wept as she tried to thank him. He reassured her, took her hand as it lay with the trembling roses in it on his arm, took the remaining roses from it, and put it to his lips. At that time, it seemed to him, he first finally resigned the dying hope that had flickered in nobody's heart, so much to its pain and trouble; and from that time he became in his own eyes, as to any similar hope or prospect, a very much older man, who had done with that part of life.

He put the roses in his breast, and they walked on for a little while, slowly and silently, under the umbrageous trees. Then he asked her, in a voice of cheerful kindness, was there anything else that she would say to him as her friend and her father's friend, many years older than herself; was there any trust she would repose in him, any service she would ask of him, any little aid to her happiness that she could give him the lasting gratification of believing it was in his power to render?

She was going to answer, when she was so touched by some little hidden sorrow or sympathy — what could it have been? — that she said, bursting into tears again: "Oh, Mr. Clennam! Good, generous Mr. Clennam, pray tell me you do not blame me!"

"I blame you?" said Clennam. "My dearest girl! I blame you? No!"

After clasping both her hands upon his arm, and looking confidentially up into his face, with some hurried words to the effect that she thanked him from her heart (as indeed she did, if it be the source of earnestness), she gradually composed herself, with now and then a word of encouragement from him, as they walked on slowly, and almost silently, under the darkening trees.

"And now, Minnie Gowan," at length said Clennam, smiling, "will you ask me nothing?"

"Oh! I have very much to ask of you."

"That's well! I hoped so; I am not disappointed."

"You know how I am loved at home, and how I love home. You can hardly think it, perhaps, dear Mr. Clennam," she spoke with great agitation, "seeing me going from it of my own free-will and choice, but I do so dearly love it!"

"I am sure of that," said Clennam. "Can you suppose I doubt it?"

"No, no. But it is strange, even to me, that, loving it so much and being so much beloved in it, I can bear to cast it away. It seems so neglectful of it, so unthankful."

"My dear girl," said Clennam, "it is in the natural progress and change of time. All homes are left so."

"Yes, I know; but all homes are not left with such a blank in them as there will be in mine when I am gone. Not that there is any scarcity of far better and more endearing and more accomplished girls than I am; not that I am much; but that they have made so much of me!"

Pet's affectionate heart was overcharged, and she sobbed while she pictured what would happen.

"I know what a change papa will feel at first, and I know that at first I cannot be to him anything like what I have been these many years. And it is then, Mr. Clennam, then more than at any time, that I beg and entreat you to remember him, and sometimes to keep him company when you can spare a little while; and to tell him that you know I was fonder of him when I left him than I ever was in all my life. For there is nobody — he told me so himself when he talked to me this very day — there is nobody he likes so well as you, or trusts so much."

A clew to what had passed between the father and daughter dropped like a heavy stone into the well of Clennam's heart, and swelled the water to his eyes. He said cheerily, but not quite so cheerily as he tried to say, that it should be done: that he gave her his faithful promise.

"If I do not speak of mamma," said Pet, more moved by, and more pretty in, her innocent grief than Clennam could trust himself even now to consider — for which reason he counted the trees between them and the fading light as they slowly diminished in number — "it is because mamma will understand me better in this action, and will feel my loss in a different way, and will look forward in

a different manner. But you know what a dear, devoted mother she is, and you will remember her, too; will you not?"

Let Minnie trust him, Clennam said, let Minnie trust him to do all she wished.

"And, dear Mr. Clennam," said Minnie, "because papa and one whom I need not name, do not fully appreciate and understand one another yet, as they will by and by; and because it will be the duty, and the pride, and pleasure of my new life, to draw them to a better knowledge of one another, and to be a happiness to one another, and to be proud of one another, and to love one another, both loving me so dearly; oh, as you are a kind, true man! when I am first separated from home (I am going a long distance away), try to reconcile papa to him a little more, and use your great influence to keep him before papa's mind, free from prejudice and in his real form. Will you do this for me, as you are a noble-hearted friend?"

Poor Pet! Self-deceived, mistaken child; when were such changes ever made in men's natural relations to one another: when was such reconcilement of ingrain differences ever effected? It has been tried many times by other daughters, Minnie; it has never succeeded; nothing has ever come of it but failure.

So Clennam thought. So he did not say; it was too late. He bound himself to do all she asked, and she knew full well that he would do it.

They were now at the last tree in the avenue. She stopped and withdrew her arm. Speaking to him with her eyes lifted up to his, and with the hand that had lately rested on his sleeve tremblingly

touching one of the roses in his breast as an additional appeal to him, she said, —

"Dear Mr. Clennam, in my happiness — for I am happy, though you have seen me crying — I cannot bear to leave any cloud between us. If you have anything to forgive me (not anything that I have wilfully done, but any trouble I may have caused you without meaning it, or having it in my power to help it), forgive me to-night out of your noble heart!"

He stooped to meet the guileless face that met his without shrinking. He kissed it, and answered, Heaven knew that he had nothing to forgive. As he stooped to meet the innocent face once again, she whispered "Good-by!" and he repeated it. It was taking leave of all his old hopes — all nobody's old restless doubts. They came out of the avenue next moment, arm in arm as they had entered it; and the trees seemed to close up behind them in the darkness, like their own perspective of the past.

The voices of Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, and Doyce, were audible directly, speaking near the garden-gate. Hearing Pet's name among them, Clennam called out, "She is here, with me." There was some little wondering and laughing until they came up; but, as soon as they had all come together, it ceased, and Pet glided away.

Mr. Meagles, Doyce, and Clennam, without speaking, walked up and down on the brink of the river, in the light of the rising moon, for a few minutes; and then Doyce lingered behind, and went into the house. Mr. Meagles and Clennam walked up and down together for a few minutes more without speaking, until at length the former broke silence.

"Arthur," said he, using that familiar address for the first time in their communication, "do you remember my telling you, as we walked up and down one hot morning, looking over the harbor at Marseilles, that Pet's baby sister who was dead seemed to Mother and me to have grown as she had grown, and changed as she had changed?"

"Very well."

"You remember my saying that our thoughts had never been able to separate those twin sisters, and that in our fancy, whatever Pet was, the other was?"

"Yes, very well."

"Arthur," said Mr. Meagles, much subdued, "I carry that fancy further to-night. I feel to-night, my dear fellow, as if you had loved my dead child very tenderly, and had lost her when she was like what Pet is now."

"Thank you," murmured Clennam, "thank you!" and pressed his hand.

"Will you come in?" said Mr. Meagles presently.

"In a little while."

Mr. Meagles fell away, and he was left alone. When he had walked on the river's brink in the peaceful moonlight for some half an hour, he put his hand in his breast and tenderly took out the handful of roses. Perhaps he put them to his heart, perhaps he put them to his lips, but certainly he bent down on the shore, and gently launched them on the flowing river. Pale and unreal in the moonlight, the river floated them away.

The lights were bright within doors when he entered, and the faces on which they shone, his own

face not excepted, were soon quietly cheerful. They talked of many subjects (his partner never had had such a ready store to draw upon for the beguiling of the time), and so to bed, and to sleep. While the flowers, pale and unreal in the moonlight, floated away upon the river; and thus do greater things than once were in our breasts, and near our hearts, flow from us to the eternal seas.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MRS. FLINTWINCH GOES ON DREAMING.

THE house in the City preserved its heavy dulness through all these transactions, and the invalid within it turned the same unvarying round of life. Morning, noon, and night, morning, noon, and night, each recurring with its accompanying monotony, always the same reluctant return to the same sequences of machinery, like a dragging piece of clockwork.

The wheeled chair had its associated remembrances and reveries, one may suppose, as every place that is made the station of a human being has. Pictures of demolished streets and altered houses, as they formerly were, when the occupant of the chair was familiar with them; images of people as they too used to be, with little or no allowance made for the lapse of time since they were seen; of these there must have been many in the long routine of gloomy days. To stop the clock of busy existence at the hour when we were personally sequestered from it; to suppose mankind stricken motionless when we were brought to a stand-still; to be unable to measure the changes beyond our view by any larger standard than the

shrunken one of our own uniform and contracted existence; is the infirmity of many invalids, and the mental unhealthiness of almost all recluses.

What scenes and actors the stern woman most reviewed, as she sat from season to season in her one dark room, none knew but herself. Mr. Flintwinch, with his wry presence brought to bear upon her daily life like some eccentric mechanical force, would perhaps have screwed it out of her, if there had been less resistance in her; but she was too strong for him. So far as Mistress Affery was concerned, to regard her liege lord and her disabled mistress with a face of blank wonder, to go about the house after dark with her apron over her head, always to listen for the strange noises, and sometimes to hear them, and never to emerge from her ghostly, dreamy, sleep-waking state, was occupation enough for her.

There was a fair stroke of business doing, as Mistress Affery made out, for her husband had abundant occupation in his little office, and saw more people than had been used to come there for some years. This might easily be, the house having been long deserted; but he did receive letters, and comers, and keep books, and correspond. Moreover, he went about to other counting-houses, and to wharves, and docks, and to the Custom House, and to Garraway's Coffee-house, and the Jerusalem Coffee-house, and on 'Change; so that he was much in and out. He began, too, sometimes of an evening, when Mrs. Clennam expressed no particular wish for his society, to resort to a tavern in the neighborhood to look at the shipping-news and closing prices in the evening paper, and even to

exchange small socialities with mercantile Sea Captains who frequented that establishment. At some period of every day he and Mrs. Clennam held a council on matters of business; and it appeared to Affery, who was always groping about, listening and watching, that the two clever ones were making money.

The state of mind into which Mr. Flintwinch's dazed lady had fallen had now begun to be so expressed on all her looks and actions, that she was held in very low account by the two clever ones, as a person never of strong intellect, who was becoming foolish. Perhaps because her appearance was not of a commercial cast, or perhaps because it occurred to him that his having taken her to wife might expose his judgment to doubt in the minds of customers, Mr. Flintwinch laid his commands upon her that she should hold her peace on the subject of her conjugal relations, and should no longer call him Jeremiah out of the domestic trio. Her frequent forgetfulness of this admonition intensified her startled manner, since Mr. Flintwinch's habit of avenging himself on her remissness by making springs after her on the staircase, and shaking her, occasioned her to be always nervously uncertain when she might be thus waylaid next.

Little Dorrit had finished a long day's work in Mrs. Clennam's room, and was neatly gathering up her shreds and odds and ends before going home. Mr. Pancks, whom Affery had just shown in, was addressing an inquiry to Mrs. Clennam on the subject of her health, coupled with the remark that, "happening to find himself in that direction," he had looked in to inquire, on behalf of his proprietor,

how she found herself. Mrs. Clennam, with a deep contraction of her brows, was looking at him.

"Mr. Casby knows," said she, "that I am not subject to changes. The change that I await here is the great change."

"Indeed, ma'am!" returned Mr. Pancks, with a wandering eye towards the figure of the little seamstress on her knee, picking threads and fraying, of her work from the carpet. "You look nicely, ma'am."

"I bear what I have to bear," she answered. "Do you what you have to do."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Mr. Pancks; "such is my endeavor."

"You are often in this direction, are you not?" asked Mrs. Clennam.

"Why, yes, ma'am," said Pancks, "rather so lately; I have lately been round this way a good deal, owing to one thing and another."

"Beg Mr. Casby and his daughter not to trouble themselves, by deputy, about me. When they wish to see me, they know I am here to see them. They have no need to trouble themselves to send. You have no need to trouble yourself to come."

"Not the least trouble, ma'am," said Mr. Pancks. "You really are looking uncommonly nicely, ma'am."

"Thank you. Good-evening."

The dismissal, and its accompanying finger pointed straight at the door, was so curt and direct that Mr. Pancks did not see his way to prolonging his visit. He stirred up his hair with his sprightliest expression, glanced at the little figure again, said "Good-evening, ma'am; don't come down, Mrs. Affery; I know the road to the door," and steamed

out. Mrs. Clennam, her chin resting on her hand, followed him with attentive and darkly distrustful eyes; and Affery stood looking at her, as if she were spell-bound.

Slowly and thoughtfully Mrs. Clennam's eyes turned from the door by which Pancks had gone out, to Little Dorrit, rising from the carpet. With her chin drooping more heavily on her hand, and her eyes vigilant and lowering, the sick woman sat looking at her until she attracted her attention. Little Dorrit colored under such a gaze, and looked down. Mrs. Clennam still sat intent.

"Little Dorrit," she said when she at last broke silence, "what do you know of that man?"

"I don't know anything of him, ma'am, except that I have seen him about, and that he has spoken to me."

"What has he said to you?"

"I don't understand what he has said, he is so strange. But nothing rough or disagreeable."

"Why does he come here to see you?"

"I don't know, ma'am," said Little Dorrit with perfect frankness.

"You know that he does come here to see you?"

"I have fancied so," said Little Dorrit. "But why he should come here or anywhere for that, ma'am, I can't think."

Mrs. Clennam cast her eyes towards the ground, and with her strong set face as intent upon a subject in her mind as it had lately been upon the form that seemed to pass out of her view, sat absorbed. Some minutes elapsed before she came out of this thoughtfulness, and resumed her hard composure.

Little Dorrit in the mean while had been waiting

to go, but afraid to disturb her by moving. She now ventured to leave the spot where she had been standing since she had risen, and to pass gently round by the wheeled chair. She stopped at its side to say, "Good-night, ma'am."

Mrs. Clennam put out her hand, and laid it on her arm. Little Dorrit, confused under the touch, stood faltering. Perhaps some momentary recollection of the story of the Princess may have been in her mind.

"Tell me, Little Dorrit," said Mrs. Clennam. "Have you many friends now?"

"Very few, ma'am. Besides you, only Miss Flora and — one more."

"Meaning," said Mrs. Clennam, with her unbent finger again pointing to the door, "that man?"

"Oh, no, ma'am!"

"Some friend of his, perhaps?"

"No, ma'am." Little Dorrit earnestly shook her head. "Oh, no! No one at all like him, or belonging to him."

"Well!" said Mrs. Clennam, almost smiling. "It is no affair of mine. I ask because I take an interest in you; and because I believe I was your friend, when you had no other who could serve you. Is that so?"

"Yes, ma'am; indeed it is. I have been here many a time when, but for you and the work you gave me, we should have wanted everything."

"We," repeated Mrs. Clennam, looking towards the watch, once her dead husband's, which always lay upon her table. "Are there many of you?"

"Only father and I now. I mean, only father and I to keep regularly out of what we get."

"Have you undergone many privations? You and your father, and who else there may be of you?" asked Mrs. Clennam, speaking deliberately, and meditatively turning the watch over and over.

"Sometimes it has been rather hard to live," said Little Dorrit in her soft voice, and timid uncomplaining way; "but I think not harder — as to that — than many people find it."

"That's well said!" Mrs. Clennam quickly returned. "That's the truth! You are a good, thoughtful girl. You are a grateful girl too, or I much mistake you."

"It is only natural to be that. There is no merit in being that," said Little Dorrit. "I am indeed."

Mrs. Clennam, with a gentleness of which the dreaming Affery had never dreamed her to be capable, drew down the face of her little seamstress, and kissed her on the forehead.

"Now go, Little Dorrit," said she, "or you will be late, poor child!"

In all the dreams Mistress Affery had been piling up since she first became devoted to the pursuit, she had dreamed nothing more astonishing than this. Her head ached with the idea that she would find the other clever one kissing Little Dorrit next, and then the two clever ones embracing each other, and dissolving into tears of tenderness for all mankind. The idea quite stunned her as she attended the light footsteps down the stairs, that the house-door might be safely shut.

On opening it to let Little Dorrit out, she found Mr. Pancks, instead of having gone his way, as in any less wonderful place and among less wonderful phenomena he might have been reasonably expected

to do, fluttering up and down the court outside the house. The moment he saw Little Dorrit, he passed her briskly, said, with his finger to his nose (as Mistress Affery distinctly heard), "Pancks the gypsy fortune-telling," and went away. "Lord save us, here's a gypsy and a fortune-teller in it now!" cried Mistress Affery. "What next?"

She stood at the open door, staggering herself with this enigma, on a rainy, thundery evening. The clouds were flying fast, the wind was coming up in gusts, banging some neighboring shutters that had broken loose, twirling the rusty chimney cowls and weather-cocks, and rushing round and round a confined adjacent churchyard as if it had a mind to blow the dead citizens out of their graves. The low thunder, muttering in all quarters of the sky at once, seemed to threaten vengeance for this attempted desecration, and to mutter, "Let them rest! Let them rest!"

Mistress Affery, whose fear of thunder and lightning was only to be equalled by her dread of the haunted house with a premature and preternatural darkness in it, stood undecided whether to go in or not, until the question was settled for her by the door blowing upon her in a violent gust of wind, and shutting her out. "What's to be done now, what's to be done now?" cried Mistress Affery, wringing her hands in this last uneasy dream of all; "when she's all alone by herself inside, and can no more come down to open it than the churchyard dead themselves!"

In this dilemma, Mistress Affery, with her apron as a hood to keep the rain off, ran crying up and down the solitary paved enclosure several times.

Why she should then stoop down and look in at the keyhole of the door, as if an eye would open it, it would be difficult to say; but it is none the less what most people would have done in the same situation, and it is what she did.

From this posture she started up suddenly, with a half-scream, feeling something on her shoulder. It was the touch of a hand; of a man's hand.

The man was dressed like a traveller, in a foraging-cap with fur about it, and a heap of cloak. He looked like a foreigner. He had a quantity of hair and mustache — jet black, except at the shaggy ends, where it had a tinge of red — and a high hook nose. He laughed at Mistress Affery's start and cry, and, as he laughed, his mustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his mustache.

"What's the matter?" he asked in plain English. "What are you frightened at?"

"At you," panted Affery.

"Me, madam?"

"And the dismal evening, and — and everything," said Affery. "And here! The wind has been and blown the door to, and I can't get in."

"Hah!" said the gentleman, who took that very coolly. "Indeed! Do you know such a name as Clennam about here?"

"Lord bless us, I should think I did, I should think I did!" cried Affery, exasperated into a new wringing of hands by the inquiry.

"Where about here?"

"Where?" cried Affery, goaded into another inspection of the keyhole. "Where but here in this house? And she's all alone in her room, and lost the use of her limbs, and can't stir to help herself or

me, and the t'other clever one's out, and Lord forgive me!" cried Affery, driven into a frantic dance by these accumulated considerations, "if I ain't a-going headlong out of my mind!"

Taking a warmer view of the matter now that it concerned himself, the gentleman stepped back to glance at the house, and his eyes soon rested on the long narrow window of the little room near the hall-door.

"Where may the lady be who has lost the use of her limbs, madam?" he inquired, with that peculiar smile which Mistress Affery could not choose but keep her eyes upon.

"Up there!" said Affery. "Them two windows."

"Hah! I am of a fair size, but could not have the honor of presenting myself in that room without a ladder. Now, madam, frankly — frankness is a part of my character — shall I open the door for you?"

"Yes, bless you, sir, for a dear creetur, and do it at once," cried Affery, "for she may be a-calling to me at this very present minute, or may be setting herself afire and burning herself to death, or there's no knowing what may be happening to her, and me a-going out of my mind at thinking of it!"

"Stay, my good madam!" He restrained her impatience with a smooth white hand. "Business hours, I apprehend, are over for the day?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" cried Affery. "Long ago."

"Let me make, then, a fair proposal. Fairness is a part of my character. I am just landed from the packet-boat, as you may see." He showed her that his cloak was very wet, and that his boots were saturated with water; she had previously observed that he was dishevelled and sallow, as if from a

rough voyage, and so chilled that he could not keep his teeth from chattering. "I am just landed from the packet-boat, madam, and have been delayed by the weather; the infernal weather! In consequence of this, madam, some necessary business that I should otherwise have transacted here within the regular hours (necessary business, because money business), still remains to be done. Now, if you will fetch any authorized neighboring somebody to do it, in return for my opening the door, I'll open the door. If this arrangement should be objectionable, I'll" — and with the same smile he made a significant feint of backing away.

Mistress Affery, heartily glad to effect the proposed compromise, gave in her willing adhesion to it. The gentleman at once requested her to do him the favor of holding his cloak, took a short run at the narrow window, made a leap at the sill, clung his way up the bricks, and in a moment had his hand at the sash, raising it. His eyes looked so very sinister as he put his leg into the room and glanced round at Mistress Affery, that she thought with a sudden coldness, if he were to go straight up-stairs to murder the invalid, what could she do to prevent him?

Happily he had no such purpose; for he reappeared, in a moment, at the house-door. "Now, my dear madam," he said as he took back his cloak and threw it on, "if you'll have the goodness to — What the devil's that?"

The strangest of sounds. Evidently close at hand, from the peculiar shock it communicated to the air, yet subdued as if it were far off. A tremble, a rumble, and a fall of some light dry matter.

"What the devil is it?"

"I don't know what it is, but I've heard the like of it over and over again," said Affery, who had caught his arm.

He could hardly be a very brave man, even she thought in her dreamy start and fright, for his trembling lips had turned colorless. After listening a few moments, he made light of it.

"Bah! Nothing! Now, my dear madam, I think you spoke of some clever personage. Will you be so good as to confront me with that genius?" He held the door in his hand, as though he were quite ready to shut her out again if she failed.

"Don't you say anything about the door and me, then," whispered Affery.

"Not a word."

"And don't you stir from here, or speak if she calls, while I run round the corner."

"Madam, I am a statue."

Affery had so vivid a fear of his going stealthily up-stairs the moment her back was turned, that, after hurrying out of sight, she returned to the gateway to peep at him. Seeing him still on the threshold, more out of the house than in it, as if he had no love for darkness and no desire to probe its mysteries, she flew into the next street, and sent a message into the tavern to Mr. Flintwinch, who came out directly. The two returning together — the lady in advance, and Mr. Flintwinch coming up briskly behind, animated with the hope of shaking her before she could get housed — saw the gentleman standing in the same place in the dark, and heard the strong voice of Mrs. Clennam calling from her room, "Who is it? What is it? Why does no one answer? Who *is* that down there?"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WORD OF A GENTLEMAN.

When Mr. and Mrs. Flintwinch panted up to the door of the old house in the twilight, Jeremiah within a second of Affery, the stranger started back. "Death of my soul!" he exclaimed. "Why, how did you get here?"

Mr. Flintwinch, to whom these words were spoken, repaid the stranger's wonder in full. He gazed at him with blank astonishment; he looked over his own shoulder, as expecting to see some one he had not been aware of standing behind him; he gazed at the stranger again, speechlessly at a loss to know what he meant; he looked to his wife for explanation; receiving none, he pounced upon her, and shook her with such heartiness that he shook her cap off her head, saying between his teeth, with grim raillery as he did it, "Affery, my woman, you must have a dose, my woman! This is some of your tricks! You have been dreaming again, mistress. What's it about? Who is it? What does it mean? Speak out, or be choked! It's the only choice I'll give you."

Supposing Mistress Affery to have any power of election at the moment, her choice was decidedly to

be choked; for she answered not a syllable to this adjuration, but, with her bare head wagging violently backwards and forwards, resigned herself to her punishment. The stranger, however, picking up her cap with an air of gallantry, interposed.

"Permit me," said he, laying his hand on the shoulder of Jeremiah, who stopped, and released his victim. "Thank you. Excuse me. Husband and wife I know, from this playfulness. Haha! Always agreeable to see that relation playfully maintained. Listen! May I suggest that somebody up-stairs, in the dark, is becoming energetically curious to know what is going on here?"

This reference to Mrs. Clennam's voice reminded Mr. Flintwinch to step into the hall and call up the staircase. "It's all right, I am here; Affery is coming with your light." Then he said to the latter flustered woman, who was putting her cap on, "Get out with you, and get up-stairs!" and then turned to the stranger, and said to him, "Now, sir, what might you please to want?"

"I am afraid," said the stranger, "I must be so troublesome as to propose a candle."

"True," assented Jeremiah. "I was going to do so. Please to stand where you are while I get one."

The visitor was standing in the doorway, but turned a little into the gloom of the house as Mr. Flintwinch turned, and pursued him with his eyes into the little room, where he groped about for a phosphorus box. When he found it, it was damp, or otherwise out of order; and match after match that he struck into it lighted sufficiently to throw a dull glare about his groping face, and to sprinkle his hands with pale little spots of fire, but not

sufficiently to light the candle. The stranger, taking advantage of this fitful illumination of his visage, looked intently and wonderingly at him. Jeremiah, when he at last lighted the candle, knew he had been doing this, by seeing the last shade of a lowering watchfulness clear away from his face, as it broke into the doubtful smile that was a large ingredient in its expression.

"Be so good," said Jeremiah, closing the house-door, and taking a pretty sharp survey of the smiling visitor in his turn, "as to step into my counting-house. — It's all right, I tell you!" petulantly breaking off to answer the voice up-stairs, still unsatisfied, though Affery was there, speaking in persuasive tones. "Don't I tell you it's all right? Preserve the woman, has she no reason at all in her?"

"Timorous," remarked the stranger.

"Timorous!" said Mr. Flintwinch, turning his head to retort, as he went before with the candle. "More courageous than ninety men in a hundred, sir, let me tell you."

"Though an invalid?"

"Many years an invalid. Mrs. Clennam. The only one of that name left in the House now. My partner."

Saying something apologetically, as he crossed the hall, to the effect that at that time of night they were not in the habit of receiving any one, and were always shut up, Mr. Flintwinch led the way into his own office, which presented a sufficiently business-like appearance. Here he put the light on his desk, and said to the stranger, with his wryest twist upon him, "Your commands."

"My name is Blandois."

"Blandois. I don't know it," said Jeremiah.

"I thought it possible," resumed the other, "that you might have been advised from Paris" —

"We have had no advice from Paris respecting anybody of the name of Blandois," said Jeremiah.

"No?"

"No."

Jeremiah stood in his favorite attitude. The smiling Mr. Blandois, opening his cloak to get his hand to a breast-pocket, paused to say, with a laugh in his glittering eyes, which it occurred to Mr. Flintwinch were too near together: —

"You are so like a friend of mine! Not so identically the same as I supposed when I really did for the moment take you to be the same in the dusk — for which I ought to apologize; permit me to do so; a readiness to confess my errors is, I hope, a part of the frankness of my character — still, however, uncommonly like."

"Indeed!" said Jeremiah perversely. "But I have not received any letter of advice from anywhere, respecting anybody of the name of Blandois."

"Just so," said the stranger.

"*Just* so," said Jeremiah.

Mr. Blandois, not at all put out by this omission on the part of the correspondents of the house of Clennam and Co., took his pocket-book from his breast-pocket, selected a letter from that receptacle, and handed it to Mr. Flintwinch. "No doubt you are well acquainted with the writing. Perhaps the letter speaks for itself, and requires no advice. You are a far more competent judge of such affairs than I am. It is my misfortune to be not so much a man

of business, as what the world calls (arbitrarily) a gentleman."

Mr. Flintwinch took the letter, and read, under date of Paris, "We have to present to you, on behalf of a highly esteemed correspondent of our Firm, M. Blandois, of this city," etc. "Such facilities as he may require, and such attentions as may lie in your power," etc. "Also have to add that if you will honor M. Blandois' drafts at sight to the extent of, say, Fifty Pounds sterling (£50)," etc.

"Very good, sir," said Mr. Flintwinch. "Take a chair. To the extent of anything that our House can do — we are in a retired, old-fashioned steady way of business, sir — we shall be happy to render you our best assistance. I observe, from the date of this, that we could not yet be advised of it. Probably you came over with the delayed mail that brings the advice."

"That I came over with the delayed mail, sir," returned Mr. Blandois, passing his white hand down his high hooked nose, "I know to the cost of my head and stomach; the detestable and intolerable weather having racked them both. You see me in the plight in which I came out of the packet within this half-hour. I ought to have been here hours ago, and then I should not have to apologize — permit me *to* apologize — for presenting myself so unseasonably, and frightening — no, by the by, you said not frightening; permit me to apologize again — the esteemed lady, Mrs. Clennam, in her invalid chamber above-stairs."

Swagger, and an air of authorized condescension, do so much, that Mr. Flintwinch had already begun to think this a highly gentlemanly personage. Not

the less unyielding with him on that account, he scraped his chin, and said, what could he have the honor of doing for Mr. Blandois, to-night, out of business hours?

"Faith!" returned that gentleman, shrugging his cloaked shoulders, "I must change, and eat and drink, and be lodged somewhere. Have the kindness to advise me, a total stranger, where, and money is a matter of perfect indifference until to-morrow. The nearer the place, the better. Next door, if that's all."

Mr. Flintwinch was slowly beginning, "For a gentleman of your habits, there is not in this immediate neighborhood any hotel"—when Mr. Blandois took him up.

"So much for my habits, my dear sir!" snapping his fingers. "A citizen of the world has no habits. That I am, in my poor way, a gentleman, by Heaven! I will not deny, but I have no unaccommodating prejudiced habits. A clean room, a hot dish for dinner, and a bottle of not absolutely poisonous wine, are all I want to-night. But I want that much, without the trouble of going one unnecessary inch to get it."

"There is," said Mr. Flintwinch with more than his usual deliberation, as he met, for a moment, Mr. Blandois' shining eyes, which were restless; "there is a coffee-house and tavern close here, which, so far, I can recommend; but there's no style about it."

"I dispense with style!" said Mr. Blandois, waving his hand. "Do me the honor to show me the house, and introduce me there (if I am not too troublesome), and I shall be infinitely obliged."

Mr. Flintwinch, upon this, looked up his hat, and lighted Mr. Blandois across the hall again. As he put the candle on a bracket, where the dark old panelling almost served as an extinguisher for it, he bethought himself of going up to tell the invalid that he would not be absent five minutes.

"Oblige me," said the visitor, on his saying so, "by presenting my card of visit. Do me the favor to add that I shall be happy to wait on Mrs. Clennam, to offer my personal compliments, and to apologize for having occasioned any agitation in this tranquil corner, if it should suit her convenience to endure the presence of a stranger for a few minutes, after he shall have changed his wet clothes and fortified himself with something to eat and drink."

Jeremiah made all despatch, and said, on his return, "She'll be glad to see you, sir; but, being conscious that her sick-room has no attractions, wishes me to say that she won't hold you to your offer, in case you should think better of it."

"To think better of it," returned the gallant Blandois, "would be to slight a lady; to slight a lady would be to be deficient in chivalry towards the sex, and chivalry towards the sex is a part of my character!" Thus expressing himself, he threw the draggled skirt of his cloak over his shoulder, and accompanied Mr. Flintwinch to the tavern; taking up on the road a porter, who was waiting with his portmanteau on the outer side of the gateway.

The house was kept in a homely manner, and the condescension of Mr. Blandois was infinite. It seemed to fill to inconvenience the little bar, in which the widow landlady and her two daughters

received him; it was much too big for the narrow wainscoted room with a bagatelle board in it, that was first proposed for his reception; it perfectly swamped the little private holiday sitting-room of the family, which was finally given up to him. Here, in dry clothes and scented linen, with sleeked hair, a great ring on each forefinger, and a massive show of watch-chain, Mr. Blandois waiting for his dinner, lolling on a window-seat with his knees drawn up, looked (for all the difference in the setting of the jewel) fearfully and wonderfully like a certain Monsieur Rigaud who had once so waited for his breakfast, lying on the stone ledge of the iron grating of a cell in a villanous dungeon at Marseilles.

His greed at dinner, too, was closely in keeping with the greed of Monsieur Rigaud at breakfast. His avaricious manner of collecting all the eatables about him, and devouring some with his eyes, while devouring others with his jaws, was the same manner. His utter disregard of other people, as shown in his way of tossing the little womanly toys of furniture about, flinging favorite cushions under his boots for a softer rest, and crushing delicate coverings with his big body and his great black head, had the same brute selfishness at the bottom of it. The softly moving hands, that were so busy among the dishes, had the old wicked facility of the hands that had clung to the bars. And when he could eat no more, and sat sucking his delicate fingers one by one, and wiping them on a cloth, there wanted nothing but the substitution of vine-leaves to finish the picture.

On this man, with his mustache going up and his nose coming down in that most evil of smiles, and

with his surface eyes looking as if they belonged to his dyed hair, and had had their natural power of reflecting light stopped by some similar process, Nature, always true, and never working in vain, had set the mark, Beware! It was not her fault if the warning were fruitless. She is never to blame in any such instance.

Mr. Blandois, having finished his repast and cleaned his fingers, took a cigar from his pocket, and, lying on the window-seat again, smoked it out at his leisure, occasionally apostrophizing the smoke as it parted from his thin lips in a thin stream: —

"Blandois, you shall turn the tables on society, my little child. Haha! Holy blue, you have begun well, Blandois! At a pinch, an excellent master in English or French; a man for the bosom of families! You have a quick perception, you have humor, you have ease, you have insinuating manners, you have a good appearance; in effect, you are a gentleman! A gentleman you shall live, my small boy, and a gentleman you shall die. You shall win, however the game goes. They shall all confess your merit, Blandois. You shall subdue the society which has grievously wronged you to your own high spirit. Death of my soul! You are high-spirited by right and by nature, my Blandois!"

To such soothing murmurs did this gentleman smoke out his cigar and drink out his bottle of wine. Both being finished, he shook himself into a sitting attitude; and with the concluding serious apostrophe, "Hold, then! Blandois, you ingenious one, have all your wits about you!" arose and went back to the house of Clennam and Co.

He was received at the door by Mistress Affery,

who, under instructions from her lord, had lighted up two candles in the hall, and a third on the staircase, and who conducted him to Mrs. Clennam's room. Tea was prepared there, and such little company arrangements had been made as usually attended the reception of expected visitors. They were slight on the greatest occasion, never extending beyond the production of the china tea-service, and the covering of the bed with a sober and sad drapery. For the rest, there was the bier-like sofa with the block upon it, and the figure in the widow's dress, as if attired for execution; the fire topped by the mound of damp ashes; the grate with its second little mound of ashes; the kettle and the smell of black dye; all as they had been for fifteen years.

Mr. Flintwinch presented the gentleman commended to the consideration of Clennam and Co. Mrs. Clennam, who had the letter lying before her, bent her head, and requested him to sit. They looked very closely at one another. That was but natural curiosity.

"I thank you, sir, for thinking of a disabled woman like me. Few who come here on business have any remembrance to bestow on one so removed from observation. It would be idle to expect that they should have. Out of sight, out of mind. When I am grateful for the exception, I don't complain of the rule."

Mr. Blandois, in his most gentlemanly manner, was afraid he had disturbed her by unhappily presenting himself at such an unconscionable time. For which he had already offered his best apologies to Mr. — he begged pardon — but by name had not the distinguished honor —

"Mr. Flintwinch has been connected with the House many years."

Mr. Blandois was Mr. Flintwinch's most obedient humble servant. He entreated Mr. Flintwinch to receive the assurance of his profoundest consideration.

"My husband being dead," said Mrs. Clennam, "and my son preferring another pursuit, our old House has no other representative in these days than Mr. Flintwinch."

"What do you call yourself?" was the surly demand of that gentleman. "You have the head of two men."

"My sex disqualifies me," she proceeded with merely a slight turn of her eyes in Jeremiah's direction, "from taking a responsible part in the business, even if I had the ability; and therefore Mr. Flintwinch combines my interest with his own, and conducts it. It is not what it used to be: but some of our old friends (principally the writers of this letter) have the kindness not to forget us, and we retain the power of doing what they intrust to us as efficiently as we ever did. This, however, is not interesting to you. You are English, sir?"

"Faith, madam, no; I am neither born nor bred in England. In effect, I am of no country," said Mr. Blandois, stretching out his leg and smiting it: "I descend from half a dozen countries."

"You have been much about the world?"

"It is true. By Heaven, madam, I have been here and there and everywhere!"

"You have no ties, probably. Are not married?"

"Madam," said Mr. Blandois with an ugly fall of his eyebrows, "I adore your sex, but I am not married — never was."

Mistress Affery, who stood at the table near him pouring out the tea, happened in her dreamy state to look at him as he said these words, and to fancy that she caught an expression in his eyes which attracted her own eyes so that she could not get them away. The effect of this fancy was to keep her staring at him with the teapot in her hand, not only to her own great uneasiness, but manifestly to his too; and through them both, to Mrs. Clennam's and Mr. Flintwinch's. Thus a few ghostly moments supervened, when they were all confusedly staring without knowing why.

"Affery," her mistress was the first to say, "what is the matter with you?"

"I don't know," said Mistress Affery, with her disengaged left hand extended towards the visitor. "It ain't me. It's him!"

"What does this good woman mean?" cried Mr. Blandois, turning white, hot, and slowly rising with a look of such deadly wrath that it contrasted surprisingly with the slight force of his words. "How is it possible to understand this good creature?"

"It's *not* possible," said Mr. Flintwinch, screwing himself rapidly in that direction. "She don't know what she means. She's an idiot, a wanderer in her mind. She shall have a dose, she shall have such a dose! Get along with you, my woman," he added in her ear, "get along with you, while you know you're Affery, and before you're shaken to yeast."

Mistress Affery, sensible of the danger in which her identity stood, relinquished the teapot as her husband seized it, put her apron over her head, and in a twinkling vanished. The visitor gradually broke into a smile, and sat down again.

"You'll excuse her, Mr. Blandois," said Jeremiah, pouring out the tea himself; "she's failing and breaking up; that's what she's about. Do you take sugar, sir?"

"Thank you; no tea for me. — Pardon my observing it, but that's a very remarkable watch!"

The tea-table was drawn up near the sofa, with a small interval between it and Mrs. Clennam's own particular table. Mr. Blandois in his gallantry had risen to hand that lady her tea (her dish of toast was already there), and it was in placing the cup conveniently within her reach that the watch, lying before her as it always did, attracted his attention. Mrs. Clennam looked suddenly up at him.

"May I be permitted? Thank you. A fine old-fashioned watch," he said, taking it in his hand. "Heavy for use, but massive and genuine. I have a partiality for everything genuine. Such as I am, I am genuine myself. Hah! A gentleman's watch with two cases in the old fashion. May I remove it from the outer case? Thank you. Ay? An old silk watch-lining, worked with beads! I have often seen these among old Dutch people and Belgians. Quaint things!"

"They are old-fashioned too," said Mrs. Clennam.

"Very. But this is not as old as the watch, I think?"

"I think not."

"Extraordinary how they used to complicate these ciphers!" remarked Mr. Blandois, glancing up with his own smile again. "Now, is this D. N. F.? It might be almost anything."

"Those are the letters."

Mr. Flintwinch, who had been observantly pausing

all this time with a cup of tea in his hand, and his mouth open ready to swallow the contents, began to do so: always entirely filling his mouth before he emptied it at a gulp; and always deliberating again before he refilled it.

"D. N. F. was some tender lovely fascinating fair creature, I make no doubt," observed Mr. Blandois as he snapped on the case again. "I adore her memory on the assumption. Unfortunately for my peace of mind, I adore but too readily. It may be a vice, it may be a virtue, but adoration of female beauty and merit constitutes three parts of my character, madam."

Mr. Flintwinch had by this time poured himself out another cup of tea, which he was swallowing in gulps as before, with his eyes directed to the invalid.

"You may be heart-free here, sir," she returned to Mr. Blandois. "Those letters are not intended, I believe, for the initials of any name."

"Of a motto, perhaps," said Mr. Blandois casually.

"Of a sentence. They have always stood, I believe, for Do Not Forget!"

"And naturally," said Mr. Blandois, replacing the watch, and stepping backward to his former chair, "you do *not* forget."

Mr. Flintwinch, finishing his tea, not only took a longer gulp than he had taken yet, but made his succeeding pause under new circumstances: that is to say, with his head thrown back, and his cup still held at his lips, while his eyes were still directed at the invalid. She had that force of face, and that concentrated air of collecting her firmness or obstinacy, which represented in her case what would

have been gesture and action in another, as she replied with her deliberate strength of speech, —

"No, sir, I do not forget. To lead a life as monotonous as mine has been during many years is not the way to forget. To lead a life of self-correction is not the way to forget. To be sensible of having (as we all have, every one of us, all the children of Adam!) offences to expiate, and peace to make, does not justify the desire to forget. Therefore I have long dismissed it, and I neither forget nor wish to forget."

Mr. Flintwinch, who had latterly been shaking the sediment at the bottom of his teacup round and round, here gulped it down, and putting the cup in the tea-tray, as done with, turned his eye upon Mr. Blandois, as if to ask him what he thought of that?

"All expressed, madam," said Mr. Blandois, with his smoothest bow and his white hand on his breast, "by the word 'naturally,' which I am proud to have had sufficient apprehension and appreciation (but without appreciation I could not be Blandois) to employ."

"Pardon me, sir," she returned, "if I doubt the likelihood of a gentleman of pleasure, and change, and politeness, accustomed to court and to be courted" —

"Oh, madam! By Heaven!"

"— If I doubt the likelihood of such a character quite comprehending what belongs to mine in my circumstances. Not to obtrude doctrine upon you," she looked at the rigid pile of hard pale books before her, "(for you go your own way, and the consequences are on your own head), I will say this

much: that I shape my course by pilots, strictly by proved and tried pilots, under whom I cannot be shipwrecked — cannot be — and that, if I were unmindful of the admonition conveyed in those three letters, I should not be half as chastened as I am."

It was curious how she seized the occasion to argue with some invisible opponent. Perhaps with her own better sense, always turning upon herself and her own deception.

"If I forgot my ignorances in my life of health and freedom, I might complain of the life to which I am now condemned. I never do; I never have done. If I forgot that this scene, the Earth, is expressly meant to be a scene of gloom, and hardship, and dark trial, for the creatures who are made out of its dust, I might have some tenderness for its vanities. But I have no such tenderness. If I did not know that we are, every one, the subject (most justly the subject) of a wrath that must be satisfied, and against which mere actions are nothing, I might repine at the difference between me, imprisoned here, and the people who pass that gateway yonder. But I take it as a grace and favor to be elected to make the satisfaction I am making here, to know what I know for certain here, and to work out what I have worked out here. My affliction might otherwise have had no meaning to me. Hence I would forget, and I do forget, nothing. Hence I am contented, and say it is better with me than with millions."

As she spoke these words, she put her hand upon the watch, and restored it to the precise spot on her little table which it always occupied. With her

touch lingering upon it, she sat for some moments afterwards, looking at it steadily and half defiantly.

Mr. Blandois, during this exposition, had been strictly attentive, keeping his eyes fastened on the lady, and thoughtfully stroking his mustache with his two hands. Mr. Flintwinch had been a little fidgety, and now struck in.

"There, there, there!" said he. "That is quite understood, Mrs. Clennam, and you have spoken piously and well. Mr. Blandois, I suspect, is not of a pious cast."

"On the contrary, sir!" that gentleman protested, snapping his fingers. "Your pardon! It's a part of my character. I am sensitive, ardent, conscientious, and imaginative. A sensitive, ardent, conscientious, and imaginative man, Mr. Flintwinch, must be that, or nothing!"

There was an inkling of suspicion in Mr. Flintwinch's face that he might be nothing, as he swaggered out of his chair (it was characteristic of this man, as it is of all men similarly marked, that, whatever he did, he overdid, though it were sometimes by only a hair's-breadth), and approached to take his leave of Mrs. Clennam.

"With what will appear to you the egotism of a sick old woman, sir," she then said, "though really through your accidental allusion, I have been led away into the subject of myself and my infirmities. Being so considerate as to visit me, I hope you will be likewise so considerate as to overlook that. Don't compliment me, if you please." For he was evidently going to do it. "Mr. Flintwinch will be happy to render you any service, and I hope your stay in this city may prove agreeable."

Mr. Blandois thanked her, and kissed his hand several times. "This is an old room," he remarked with a sudden sprightliness of manner, looking round when he got near the door. "I have been so interested that I have not observed it. But it's a genuine old room."

"It is a genuine old house," said Mrs. Clennam with her frozen smile. "A place of no pretensions, but a piece of antiquity."

"Faith!" cried the visitor. "If Mr. Flintwinch would do me the favor to take me through the rooms on my way out, he could hardly oblige me more. An old house is a weakness with me. I have many weaknesses, but none greater. I love and study the picturesque in all its varieties. I have been called picturesque myself. It is no merit to be picturesque — I have greater merits, perhaps — but I may be by an accident. Sympathy, sympathy!"

"I tell you beforehand, Mr. Blandois, that you'll find it very dingy, and very bare," said Jeremiah, taking up the candle. "It's not worth your looking at." But Mr. Blandois, smiting him in a friendly manner on the back, only laughed; so the said Blandois kissed his hand again to Mrs. Clennam, and they went out of the room together.

"You don't care to go up-stairs?" said Jeremiah on the landing.

"On the contrary, Mr. Flintwinch; if not tiresome to you, I shall be ravished!"

Mr. Flintwinch, therefore, wormed himself up the staircase, and Mr. Blandois followed close. They ascended to the great garret bedroom which Arthur had occupied on the night of his return.

"There, Mr. Blandois!" said Jeremiah, showing it, "I hope you may think that worth coming so high to see. I confess I don't."

Mr. Blandois being enraptured, they walked through other garrets and passages, and came down the staircase again. By this time Mr. Flintwinch had remarked that he never found the visitor looking at any room, after throwing one quick glance around, but always found the visitor looking at him, Mr. Flintwinch. With this discovery in his thoughts, he turned about on the staircase for another experiment. He met his eyes directly; and, on the instant of their fixing one another, the visitor, with that ugly play of nose and mustache, laughed (as he had done at every similar moment since they left Mrs. Clennam's chamber) a diabolically silent laugh.

As a much shorter man than the visitor, Mr. Flintwinch was at the physical disadvantage of being thus disagreeably leered at from a height; and as he went first down the staircase, and was usually a step or two lower than the other, this disadvantage was at the time increased. He postponed looking at Mr. Blandois again until this accidental inequality was removed by their having entered the late Mr. Clennam's room. But, then twisting himself suddenly round upon him, he found his look unchanged.

"A most admirable old house," smiled Mr. Blandois. "So mysterious. Do you never hear any haunted noises here?"

"Noises!" returned Mr. Flintwinch. "No."

"Nor see any devils?"

"Not," said Mr. Flintwinch, grimly screwing

himself at his questioner, "not any that introduced themselves under that name and in that capacity."

"Haha! A portrait here, I see."

(Still looking at Mr. Flintwinch, as if he were the portrait.)

"It's a portrait, sir, as you observe."

"May I ask the subject, Mr. Flintwinch?"

"Mr. Clennam, deceased. Her husband."

"Former owner of the remarkable watch, perhaps?" said the visitor.

Mr. Flintwinch, who had cast his eyes towards the portrait, twisted himself about again, and again found himself the subject of the same look and smile. "Yes, Mr. Blandois," he replied tartly. "It was his, and his uncle's before him, and Lord knows who before him; and that's all I can tell you of its pedigree."

"That's a strongly marked character, Mr. Flintwinch, our friend up-stairs."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremiah, twisting himself at the visitor again, as he did during the whole of this dialogue, like some screw-machine that fell short of its grip; for the other never changed, and he always felt obliged to retreat a little. "She is a remarkable woman. Great fortitude — great strength of mind."

"They must have been very happy," said Blandois.

"Who?" demanded Mr. Flintwinch, with another screw at him.

Mr. Blandois shook his right forefinger towards the sick-room, and his left forefinger towards the portrait, and then putting his arms akimbo, and striding his legs apart, stood smiling down at Mr.

Flintwinch with the advancing nose and the retreating mustache.

"As happy as most other married people, I suppose," returned Mr. Flintwinch. "I can't say. I don't know. There are secrets in all families."

"Secrets!" cried Mr. Blandois quickly. "Say it again, my son."

"I say," replied Mr. Flintwinch, upon whom he had swelled himself so suddenly that Mr. Flintwinch found his face almost brushed by the dilated chest, "I say there are secrets in all families."

"So there are," cried the other, clapping him on both shoulders, and rolling him backwards and forwards. "Haha! you are right. So there are! Secrets? Holy blue! There are the devil's own secrets in some families, Mr. Flintwinch!" With that, after clapping Mr. Flintwinch on both shoulders several times, as if, in a friendly and humorous way, he were rallying him on a joke he had made, he threw up his arms, threw back his head, hooked his hands together behind it, and burst into a roar of laughter. It was in vain for Mr. Flintwinch to try another screw at him. He had his laugh out.

"But, favor me with the candle a moment," he said when he had done. "Let us have a look at the husband of the remarkable lady. Hah!" holding up the light at arm's-length. "A decided expression of face here too, though not of the same character. Looks as if he were saying — what is it — Do Not Forget — does he not, Mr. Flintwinch? By Heaven, sir, he does!"

As he returned him the candle, he looked at him once more; and then, leisurely strolling out with him into the hall, declared it to be a charming old

house indeed, and one which had so greatly pleased him, that he would not have missed inspecting it for a hundred pounds.

Throughout these singular freedoms on the part of Mr. Blandois, which involved a general alteration in his demeanor, making it much coarser and rougher, much more violent and audacious, than before, Mr. Flintwinch, whose leathern face was not liable to many changes, preserved its immobility intact. Beyond now appearing, perhaps, to have been left hanging a trifle too long before that friendly operation of cutting down, he outwardly maintained an equable composure. They had brought their survey to a close in the little room at the side of the hall, and he stood there, eying Mr. Blandois.

"I am glad you are so well satisfied, sir," was his calm remark. "I didn't expect it. You seem to be quite in good spirits."

"In admirable spirits," returned Blandois. "Word of honor! never more refreshed in spirits. Do you ever have presentiments, Mr. Flintwinch?"

"I am not sure that I know what you mean by the term, sir," replied that gentleman.

"Say in this case, Mr. Flintwinch, undefined anticipations of pleasure to come."

"I can't say I am sensible of such a sensation at present," returned Mr. Flintwinch with the utmost gravity. "If I should find it coming on, I'll mention it."

"Now, I," said Blandois, "I, my son, have a presentiment to-night that we shall be well acquainted. Do you find it coming on?"

"N—no," returned Mr. Flintwinch, deliberately inquiring of himself. "I can't say I do."

"I have a strong presentiment that we shall become intimately acquainted. — You have no feeling of that sort yet?"

"Not yet," said Mr. Flintwinch.

Mr. Blandois, taking him by both shoulders again, rolled him about a little in his former merry way, drew his arm through his own, and invited him to come off and drink a bottle of wine like a dear deep old dog as he was.

Without a moment's indecision, Mr. Flintwinch accepted the invitation, and they went out to the quarters where the traveller was lodged, through a heavy rain which had rattled on the windows, roofs, and pavements ever since nightfall. The thunder and lightning had long ago passed over, but the rain was furious. On their arrival in Mr. Blandois' room, a bottle of port wine was ordered by that gallant gentleman; who (crushing every pretty thing he could collect in the soft disposition of his dainty figure) coiled himself upon the window-seat, while Mr. Flintwinch took a chair opposite to him, with the table between them. Mr. Blandois proposed having the largest glasses in the house, to which Mr. Flintwinch assented. The bumpers filled, Mr. Blandois, with a roistering gayety, clinked the top of his glass against the bottom of Mr. Flintwinch's, and the bottom of his glass against the top of Mr. Flintwinch's, and drank to the intimate acquaintance he foresaw. Mr. Flintwinch gravely pledged him, and drank all the wine he could get, and said nothing. As often as Mr. Blandois clinked glasses (which was at every replenishment), Mr. Flintwinch stolidly did his part of the clinking, and would have stolidly done his

companion's part of the wine as well as his own; being, except in the article of palate, a mere cask.

In short, Mr. Blandois found that to pour port wine into the reticent Flintwinch was, not to open him, but to shut him up. Moreover, he had the appearance of a perfect ability to go on all night; or, if occasion were, all next day, and all next night; whereas Mr. Blandois soon grew indistinctly conscious of swaggering too fiercely and boastfully. He therefore terminated the entertainment at the end of the third bottle.

"You will draw upon us to-morrow, sir," said Mr. Flintwinch with a business-like face at parting.

"My Cabbage!" returned the other, taking him by the collar with both hands. "I'll draw upon you; have no fear. Adieu, my Flintwinch! Receive at parting"—here he gave him a southern embrace, and kissed him soundingly on both cheeks—"the word of a gentleman! By a thousand Thunders, you shall see me again!"

He did not present himself next day, though the letter of advice came duly to hand. Inquiring after him at night, Mr. Flintwinch found, with surprise, that he had paid his bill, and gone back to the Continent by way of Calais. Nevertheless, Jeremiah scraped out of his cogitating face a lively conviction that Mr. Blandois would keep his word on this occasion, and would be seen again.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SPIRIT.

ANYBODY may pass, any day, in the thronged thoroughfares of the metropolis, some meagre, wrinkled, yellow old man (who might be supposed to have dropped from the stars, if there were any star in the heavens dull enough to be suspected of casting off so feeble a spark), creeping along with a scared air, as though bewildered and a little frightened by the noise and bustle. This old man is always a little old man. If he were ever a big old man, he has shrunk into a little old man; if he were always a little old man, he has dwindled into a less old man. His coat is of a color, and cut, that never was the mode anywhere, at any period. Clearly, it was not made for him, or for any individual mortal. Some wholesale contractor measured Fate for five thousand coats of such quality, and Fate has lent this old coat to this old man, as one of a long unfinished line of many old men. It has always large dull metal buttons, similar to no other buttons. This old man wears a hat, a thumbed and napless, and yet an obdurate hat, which has never adapted itself to the shape of his poor head. His coarse shirt and his coarse neck-

cloth have no more individuality than his coat and hat; they have the same character of not being his — of not being anybody's. Yet this old man wears these clothes with a certain unaccustomed air of being dressed and elaborated for the public ways; as though he passed the greater part of his time in a nightcap and gown. And so, like the country mouse in the second year of a famine, come to see the town mouse, and timidly threading his way to the town mouse's lodging through a city of cats, this old man passes in the streets.

Sometimes, on holidays towards evening, he will be seen to walk with a slightly increased infirmity, and his old eyes will glimmer with a moist and marshy light. Then the little old man is drunk. A very small measure will overset him; he may be bowled off his unsteady legs with a half-pint pot. Some pitying acquaintance — chance acquaintance very often — has warmed up his weakness with a treat of beer, and the consequence will be the lapse of a longer time than usual before he shall pass again. For, the little old man is going home to the Workhouse; and on his good behavior they do not let him out often (though methinks they might, considering the few years he has before him to go out in under the sun); and on his bad behavior they shut him up closer than ever, in a grove of two-score and nineteen more old men, every one of whom smells of all the others.

Mrs. Plornish's father — a poor little reedy piping old gentleman, like a worn-out bird; who had been in what he called the music-binding business, and met with great misfortunes, and who had seldom been able to make his way, or to see it or to pay it,

or to do anything at all with it but find it no thoroughfare — had retired of his own accord to the Workhouse which was appointed by law to be the Good Samaritan of his district (without the twopence, which was bad political economy), on the settlement of that execution which had carried Mr. Plornish to the Marshalsea College. Previous to his son-in-law's difficulties coming to that head, Old Nandy (he was always so called in his legal Retreat, but he was Old Mr. Nandy among the Bleeding Hearts) had sat in a corner of the Plornish fireside, and taken his bite and sup out of the Plornish cupboard. He still hoped to resume that domestic position when Fortune should smile upon his son-in-law; in the mean time, while she preserved an immovable countenance, he was, and resolved to remain, one of these little old men in a grove of little old men with a community of flavor.

But, no poverty in him, and no coat on him that never was the mode, and no Old Men's Ward for his dwelling-place, could quench his daughter's admiration. Mrs. Plornish was as proud of her father's talents as she could possibly have been if they had made him Lord Chancellor. She had as firm a belief in the sweetness and propriety of his manners as she could possibly have had if he had been Lord Chamberlain. The poor little old man knew some pale and vapid little songs, long out of date, about Chloe, and Phyllis, and Strephon being wounded by the son of Venus; and for Mrs. Plornish there was no such music at the Opera as the small internal flutterings and chirpings wherein he would discharge himself of these ditties, like a weak, little, broken barrel-organ ground by a baby. On his "days out,"

those flecks of light in his flat vista of pollard old men, it was at once Mrs. Plornish's delight and sorrow, when he was strong with meat, and had taken his full halfpennyworth of porter, to say, "Sing us a song, father." Then would he give them Chloe, and if he were in pretty good spirits, Phyllis also — Strephon he had hardly been up to since he went into retirement — and then would Mrs. Plornish declare she did believe there never was such a singer as father, and wipe her eyes.

If he had come from Court on these occasions, nay, if he had been the noble Refrigerator come home triumphantly from a foreign court to be presented and promoted on his last tremendous failure, Mrs. Plornish could not have handed him with greater elevation about Bleeding Heart Yard. "Here's father," she would say, presenting him to a neighbor. "Father will soon be home with us for good, now. Ain't father looking well? Father's a sweeter singer than ever; you'd never have forgotten it, if you'd aheard him just now." As to Mr. Plornish, he had married these articles of belief in marrying Mr. Nandy's daughter, and only wondered how it was that so gifted an old gentleman had not made a fortune. This he attributed, after much reflection, to his musical genius not having been scientifically developed in his youth. "For why," argued Mr. Plornish, "why go a-binding music when you've got it in yourself? That's where it is, I consider."

Old Nandy had a patron: one patron. He had a patron who in a certain sumptuous way — an apologetic way, as if he constantly took an admiring audience to witness that he really could not help being more free with this old fellow than they might

have expected, on account of his simplicity and poverty — was mightily good to him. Old Nandy had been several times to the Marshalsea College, communicating with his son-in-law during his short durance there; and had happily acquired to himself, and had by degrees and in course of time much improved, the patronage of the Father of that national institution.

Mr. Dorrit was in the habit of receiving this old man as if the old man held of him in vassalage under some feudal tenure. He made little treats and teas for him, as if he came in with his homage from some outlying district where the tenantry were in a primitive state. It seemed as if there were moments when he could by no means have sworn but that the old man was an ancient retainer of his, who had been meritoriously faithful. When he mentioned him, he spoke of him casually as his old pensioner. He had a wonderful satisfaction in seeing him, and in commenting on his decayed condition after he was gone. It appeared to him amazing that he could hold up his head at all, poor creature! "In the Workhouse, sir, the Union; no privacy, no visitors, no station, no respect, no speciality. Most deplorable!"

It was Old Nandy's birthday, and they let him out. He said nothing about its being his birthday, or they might have kept him in; for such old men should not be born. He passed along the streets as usual to Bleeding Heart Yard, and had his dinner with his daughter and son-in-law, and gave them Phyllis. He had hardly concluded, when Little Dorrit looked in to see how they all were.

"Miss Dorrit!" said Mrs. Plornish. "Here's

father! Ain't he looking nice? And such voice he's in!"

Little Dorrit gave him her hand, and smilingly said she had not seen him this long time.

"No, they're rather hard on poor father," said Mrs. Plornish with a lengthening face, "and don't let him have half as much change and fresh air as would benefit him. But he'll soon be home for good, now. Won't you, father?"

"Yes, my dear, I hope so. In good time, please God."

Here Mr. Plornish delivered himself of an oration which he invariably made, word for word the same, on all such opportunities. It was couched in the following terms: —

"John Edward Nandy. Sir. While there's a ounce of wittles or drink of any sort in this present roof, you're fully welcome to your share of it. While there's a handful of fire or a mouthful of bed in this present roof, you're fully welcome to your share on it. If so be as there should be nothing in this present roof, you should be as welcome to your share on it as if it was something much or little. And this is what I mean and so I don't deceive you, and consequently which is to stand out is to entreat of you, and therefore why not do it?"

To this lucid address, which Mr. Plornish always delivered as if he had composed it (as no doubt he had) with enormous labor, Mrs. Plornish's father pipingly replied: —

"I thank you kindly, Thomas, and I know your intentions well, which is the same I thank you kindly for. But no, Thomas. Until such times as it's not to take it out of your children's mouths,

which take it is, and call it by what name you will it do remain and equally deprive though may they come and too soon they can not come, no, Thomas, no!"

Mrs. Plornish, who had been turning her face a little away with a corner of her apron in her hand, brought herself back to the conversation again, by telling Miss Dorrit that father was going over the water to pay his respects, unless she knew of any reason why it might not be agreeable.

Her answer was, "I am going straight home, and, if he will come with me, I shall be so glad to take care of him — so glad," said Little Dorrit, always thoughtful of the feelings of the weak, "of his company."

"There, father," cried Mrs. Plornish. "Ain't you a gay young man to be going for a walk along with Miss Dorrit? Let me tie your neck-handkerchief into a regular good bow, for you're a regular beau yourself, father, if ever there was one."

With this filial joke his daughter smartened him up, and gave him a loving hug, and stood at the door with her weak child in her arms, and her strong child tumbling down the steps, looking after her little old father as he toddled away with his arm under Little Dorrit's.

They walked at a slow pace, and Little Dorrit took him by the Iron Bridge, and sat him down there for a rest, and they looked over at the water and talked about the shipping, and the old man mentioned what he would do if he had a ship full of gold coming home to him (his plan was to take a noble lodging for the Plornishes and himself at a Tea Gardens, and live there all the rest of their

lives, attended on by the waiter), and it was a special birthday for the old man. They were within five minutes of their destination, when, at the corner of her own street, they came upon Fanny in her new bonnet bound for the same port.

"Why, good gracious me, Amy!" cried that young lady, starting. "You never mean it!"

"Mean what, Fanny dear?"

"Well! I could have believed a great deal of you," returned the young lady with burning indignation, "but I don't think even I could have believed this of even you!"

"Fanny!" cried Little Dorrit, wounded and astonished.

"Oh! Don't Fanny me, you mean little thing, don't! The idea of coming along the open streets, in the broad light of day, with a Pauper!" (firing off the last word as if it were a ball from an air-gun).

"Oh, Fanny!"

"I tell you not to Fanny me, for I'll not submit to it! I never knew such a thing. The way in which you are resolved and determined to disgrace us, on all occasions, is really infamous. You bad little thing!"

"Does it disgrace anybody," said Little Dorrit very gently, "to take care of this poor old man?"

"Yes, miss," returned her sister, "and you ought to know it does. And you do know it does. And you do it because you know it does. The principal pleasure of your life is to remind your family of their misfortunes. And the next great pleasure of your existence is to keep low company. But, however, if you have no sense of decency, I have

You'll please to allow me to go on the other side of the way unmolested."

With this she bounced across to the opposite pavement. The old disgrace, who had been deferentially bowing a pace or two off (for Little Dorrit had let his arm go, in her wonder, when Fanny began), and who had been hustled and cursed by impatient passengers for stopping the way, rejoined his companion, rather giddy, and said, "I hope nothing's wrong with your honored father, miss? I hope there's nothing the matter in the honored family?"

"No, no," returned Little Dorrit. "No, thank you. Give me your arm again, Mr. Nandy. We shall soon be there now."

So, she talked to him as she had talked before, and they came to the lodge, and found Mr. Chivery on the lock, and went in. Now, it happened that the Father of the Marshalsea was sauntering towards the lodge at the moment when they were coming out of it, entering the prison arm-in-arm. As the spectacle of their approach met his view, he displayed the utmost agitation and despondency of mind; and — altogether regardless of old Nandy, who, making his reverence, stood with his hat in his hand, as he always did in that gracious presence — turned about, and hurried in at his own doorway and up the staircase.

Leaving the old unfortunate, whom in an evil hour she had taken under her protection, with a hurried promise to return to him directly, Little Dorrit hastened after her father, and, on the staircase, found Fanny following her, and flouncing up with offended dignity. The three came into the room almost together; and the Father sat down in

his chair, buried his face in his hands, and uttered a groan.

"Of course!" said Fanny. "Very proper. Poor, afflicted pa! Now I hope you believe me, miss!"

"What is it, father?" cried Little Dorrit, bending over him. "Have I made you unhappy, father? Not I, I hope!"

"You hope, indeed! I dare say! Oh, you"—Fanny paused for a sufficiently strong expression—"you Common-minded little Amy! You complete prison-child!"

He stopped these angry reproaches with a wave of his hand, and sobbed out, raising his face, and shaking his melancholy head at his younger daughter, "Amy, I know that you are innocent in intention. But you have cut me to the soul."

"Innocent in intention!" the implacable Fanny struck in. "Stuff in intention! Low in intention! Lowering of the family in intention!"

"Father!" cried Little Dorrit, pale and trembling, "I am very sorry. Pray forgive me. Tell me how it is, that I may not do it again!"

"How it is, you prevaricating little piece of goods!" cried Fanny. "You know how it is. I have told you already, so don't fly in the face of Providence by attempting to deny it!"

"Hush! Amy," said the father, passing his pocket-handkerchief several times across his face, and then grasping it convulsively in the hand that dropped across his knee, "I have done what I could to keep you select here; I have done what I could to retain you a position here. I may have succeeded; I may not. You may know it; you may not. I give no opinion. I have endured everything here

but humiliation. That I have happily been spared — until this day."

Here his convulsive grasp unclosed itself, and he put his pocket-handkerchief to his eyes again. Little Dorrit, on the ground beside him, with her imploring hand upon his arm, watched him remorsefully. Coming out of his fit of grief, he clinched his pocket-handkerchief once more.

"Humiliation I have happily been spared until this day. Through all my troubles there has been that — Spirit in myself, and that — that submission to it, if I may use the term, in those about me, which has spared me — ha — humiliation. But this day, this minute, I have keenly felt it."

"Of course! How could it be otherwise?" exclaimed the irrepressible Fanny. "Careering and prancing about with a pauper!" (air-gun again).

"But, dear father," cried Little Dorrit, "I don't justify myself for having wounded your dear heart — no! Heaven knows I don't!" She clasped her hands in quite an agony of distress. "I do nothing but beg and pray you to be comforted and overlook it. But if I had not known that you were kind to the old man yourself, and took much notice of him, and were always glad to see him, I would not have come here with him, father, I would not, indeed. What have I been so unhappy as to do, I have done in mistake. I would not wilfully bring a tear to your eyes, dear love!" said Little Dorrit, her heart well-nigh broken, "for anything the world could give me, or anything it could take away."

Fanny, with a partly angry and partly repentant sob, began to cry herself, and to say — as this young lady always said when she was half in a passion and

half out of it, half spiteful with herself and half spiteful with everybody else — that she wished she was dead.

The Father of the Marshalsea in the mean time took his younger daughter to his breast, and patted her head.

"There, there! Say no more, Amy, say no more, my child. I will forget it as soon as I can. I," with hysterical cheerfulness, "I — shall soon be able to dismiss it. It is perfectly true, my dear, that I *am* always glad to see my old pensioner — as such, as such — and that I do — ha — extend as much protection and kindness to the — hum — the bruised reed — I trust I may so call him without impropriety — as in my circumstances I can. It is quite true that this is the case, my dear child. At the same time, I preserve, in doing this, if I may — ha — if I may use the expression — Spirit. Becoming Spirit. And there are some things which are," he stopped to sob, "irreconcilable with that, and wound that — wound it deeply. It is not that I have seen my good Amy attentive, and — ha — condescending to my old pensioner — it is not that that hurts me. It is, if I am to close the painful subject by being explicit, that I have seen my child, my own child, my own daughter, coming into this college out of the public streets — smiling! smiling! — arm-in-arm with — oh, my God, a livery!"

This reference to the coat of no cut and no time the unfortunate gentleman gasped forth in a scarcely audible voice, and with his clinched pocket-handkerchief raised in the air. His excited feelings might have found some further painful utterance, but for a knock at the door, which had been already

twice repeated, and to which Fanny (still wishing herself dead, and, indeed, now going so far as to add, buried) cried, "Come in!"

"Ah, Young John!" said the Father in an altered and calmed voice. "What is it, Young John?"

"A letter for you, sir, being left in the lodge just this minute, and a message with it, I thought, happening to be there myself, sir, I would bring it to your room." The speaker's attention was much distracted by the piteous spectacle of Little Dorrit at her father's feet, with her head turned away.

"Indeed, John! Thank you."

"The letter is from Mr. Clennam, sir — it's the answer — and the message was, sir, that Mr. Clennam also sent his compliments, and word that he would do himself the pleasure of calling this afternoon, hoping to see you, and likewise," attention more distracted than before, "Miss Amy."

"Oh!" As the father glanced into the letter (there was a bank-note in it), he reddened a little, and patted Amy on the head afresh. "Thank you, Young John. Quite right. Much obliged to you for your attention. No one waiting?"

"No, sir, no one waiting."

"Thank you, John. How is your mother, Young John?"

"Thank you, sir, she's not quite as well as we could wish — in fact, we none of us are, except father — but she's pretty well, sir."

"Say we sent our remembrances, will you? Say, kind remembrances, if you please, Young John."

"Thank you, sir, I will." And Mr. Chivery, junior, went his way, having spontaneously composed on the spot an entirely new epitaph for him-

self, to the effect that Here lay the body of John Chivery, Who, having at such a date, Beheld the idol of his life, In grief and tears, And feeling unable to bear the harrowing spectacle, Immediately repaired to the abode of his inconsolable parents, And terminated his existence, By his own rash act.

"There, there, Amy!" said the Father when Young John had closed the door, "let us say no more about it." The last few minutes had improved his spirits remarkably, and he was quite lightsome. "Where is my old pensioner all this while? We must not leave him by himself any longer, or he will begin to suppose he is not welcome, and that would pain me. Will you fetch him, my child, or shall I?"

"If you wouldn't mind, father," said Little Dorrit, trying to bring her sobbing to a close.

"Certainly I will go, my dear. I forgot; your eyes are rather. There! Cheer up, Amy. Don't be uneasy about me. I am quite myself again, my love, quite myself. Go to your room, Amy, and make your face look comfortable and pleasant to receive Mr. Clennam."

"I would rather stay in my own room, father," returned Little Dorrit, finding it more difficult than before to regain her composure. "I would far rather not see Mr. Clennam."

"Oh, fie, fie, my dear, that's folly! Mr. Clennam is a very gentlemanly man — very gentlemanly. A little reserved at times; but I will say extremely gentlemanly. I couldn't think of your not being here to receive Mr. Clennam, my dear, especially this afternoon. So go and freshen yourself up, Amy; go and freshen yourself up, like a good girl."

Thus directed, Little Dorrit dutifully rose and obeyed: only pausing for a moment, as she went out of the room, to give her sister a kiss of reconciliation. Upon which that young lady, feeling much harassed in her mind, and having for the time worn out the wish with which she generally relieved it, conceived and executed the brilliant idea of wishing old Nandy dead, rather than that he should come bothering there like a disgusting, tiresome, wicked wretch, and making mischief between two sisters.

The Father of the Marshalsea, even humming a tune, and wearing his black velvet cap a little on one side, so much improved were his spirits, went down into the yard, and found his old pensioner standing hat in hand just within the gate, as he had stood all this time. "Come, Nandy!" said he with great suavity. "Come up-stairs, Nandy; you know the way; why don't you come up-stairs?" He went the length, on this occasion, of giving him his hand, and saying, "How are you, Nandy? Are you pretty well?" To which that vocalist returned, "I thank you, honored sir, I am all the better for seeing your honor." As they went along the yard, the Father of the Marshalsea presented him to a collegian of recent date. "An old acquaintance of mine, sir, an old pensioner." And then said, "Be covered, my good Nandy; put your hat on," with great consideration.

His patronage did not stop here; for he charged Maggy to get the tea ready, and instructed her to buy certain tea-cakes, fresh butter, eggs, cold ham, and shrimps: to purchase which collation he gave her a bank-note for ten pounds, laying strict injunc-

tions on her to be careful of the change. These preparations were in an advanced stage of progress, and his daughter Amy had come back with her work, when Clennam presented himself. Whom he most graciously received, and besought to join their meal.

"Amy, my love, you know Mr. Clennam even better than I have the happiness of doing. Fanny, my dear, you are acquainted with Mr, Clennam." Fanny acknowledged him haughtily; the position she tacitly took up in all such cases being that there was a vast conspiracy to insult the family by not understanding it, or sufficiently deferring to it, and here was one of the conspirators. "This, Mr. Clennam, you must know, is an old pensioner of mine, old Nandy, a very faithful old man." (He always spoke of him as an object of great antiquity, but he was two or three years younger than himself.) "Let me see. You know Plornish, I think? I think my daughter Amy has mentioned to me that you know poor Plornish?"

"Oh yes!" said Arthur Clennam.

"Well, sir, this is Mrs. Plornish's father."

"Indeed? I am glad to see him."

"You would be more glad if you knew his many good qualities, Mr. Clennam."

"I hope I shall come to know them, through knowing him," said Arthur, secretly pitying the bowed and submissive figure.

"It is a holiday with him, and he comes to see his old friends who are always glad to see him," observed the Father of the Marshalsea. Then he added behind his hand, "Union, poor old fellow! Out for the day."

By this time Maggy, quietly assisted by her Little Mother, had spread the board, and the repast was ready. It being hot weather and the prison very close, the window was as wide open as it could be pushed. "If Maggy will spread that newspaper on the window-sill, my dear," remarked the Father, complacently and in a half-whisper to Little Dorrit, "my old pensioner can have his tea there while we are having ours."

So, with a gulf between him and the good company of about a foot in width, standard measure, Mrs. Plornish's father was handsomely regaled. Clennam had never seen anything like his magnanimous protection by that other Father, he of the Marshalsea; and was lost in the contemplation of its many wonders.

The most striking of these was perhaps the relishing manner in which he remarked on the pensioner's infirmities and failings. As if he were a gracious Keeper, making a running commentary on the decline of the harmless animal he exhibited.

"Not ready for more ham yet, Nandy? Why, how slow you are! (His last teeth," he explained to the company, "are going, poor old boy!")

At another time he said, "No shrimps, Nandy?" and, on his not instantly replying, observed ("His hearing is becoming very defective. He'll be deaf directly.")

At another time he asked him, "Do you walk much, Nandy, about the yard within the walls of that place of yours?"

"No, sir; no. I haven't any great liking for that."

"No, to be sure," he assented. "Very natural."

Then he privately informed the circle ("Legs going.")

Once he asked the pensioner, in that general clemency which asked him anything to keep him afloat, how old his younger grandchild was?

"John Edward," said the pensioner, slowly laying down his knife and fork to consider. "How old, sir? Let me think, now."

The Father of the Marshalsea tapped his forehead. ("Memory weak.")

"John Edward, sir? Well, I really forget. I couldn't say, at this minute, sir, whether it's two and two months, or whether it's two and five months. It's one or the other."

"Don't distress yourself by worrying your mind about it," he returned with infinite forbearance. ("Faculties evidently decaying — old man rusts in the life he leads!")

The more of these discoveries that he persuaded himself he made in the pensioner, the better he appeared to like him; and when he got out of his chair after tea, to bid the pensioner good-by on his intimating that he feared, honored, sir, his time was running out, he made himself look as erect and strong as possible.

"We don't call this a shilling, Nandy, you know," he said, putting one in his hand. "We call it tobacco."

"Honored, sir, I thank you. It shall buy tobacco. My thanks and duty to Miss Amy and Miss Fanny. I wish you good-night, Mr. Clennam."

"And mind you don't forget us, you know, Nandy," said the Father. "You must come again, mind, whenever you have an afternoon. You must

not come out without seeing us, or we shall be jealous. Good-night, Nandy. Be very careful how you descend the stairs, Nandy; they are rather uneven and worn." With that he stood on the landing watching the old man down; and, when he came into the room again, said, with a solemn satisfaction on him, "A melancholy sight that, Mr. Clennam, though one has the consolation of knowing that he doesn't feel it himself. The poor old fellow is a dismal wreck. Spirit broken and gone — pulverized — crushed out of him, sir, completely!"

As Clennam had a purpose in remaining, he said what he could responsive to these sentiments, and stood at the window with their enunciator, while Maggy and her Little Mother washed the tea-service and cleared it away. He noticed that his companion stood at the window with the air of an affable and accessible Sovereign, and that, when any of his people in the yard below looked up, his recognition of their salutes just stopped short of a blessing.

When Little Dorrit had her work on the table, and Maggy hers on the bedstead, Fanny fell to tying her bonnet as a preliminary to her departure. Arthur, still having his purpose, still remained. At this time the door opened without any notice, and Mr. Tip came in. He kissed Amy as she started up to meet him, nodded to Fanny, nodded to his father, gloomed on the visitor without further recognition, and sat down.

"Tip, dear," said Litle Dorrit, mildly, shocked by this, "don't you see" —

"Yes, I see, Amy. If you refer to the presence of any visitor you have here — I say, if you refer to that," answered Tip, jerking his head with em-

phasis towards his shoulder nearest Clennam, "I see!"

"Is that all you say?"

"That's all I say. And I suppose," added the lofty young man after a moment's pause, "the visitor will understand me when I say that's all I say. In short, I suppose the visitor will understand that he hasn't used me like a gentleman."

"I do not understand that," observed the obnoxious personage referred to, with tranquillity.

"No? Why, then, to make it clearer to you, sir, I beg to let you know that when I address what I call a properly worded appeal, and an urgent appeal, and a delicate appeal, to an individual for a small temporary accommodation, easily within his power — easily within his power, mind! — and when that individual writes back word to me that he begs to be excused, I consider that he doesn't treat me like a gentleman."

The Father of the Marshalsea, who had surveyed his son in silence, no sooner heard this sentiment than he began, in an angry voice, —

"How dare you" — But his son stopped him.

"Now, don't ask me how I dare, father, because that's bosh. As to the fact of the line of conduct I choose to adopt towards the individual present, you ought to be proud of my showing a proper spirit."

"I should think so!" cried Fanny.

"A proper spirit?" said the Father. "Yes, a proper spirit; a becoming spirit. Is it come to this, that my son teaches me — *me* — spirit?"

"Now, don't let us bother about it, father, or have any row on the subject. I have fully made

up my mind that the individual present has not treated me like a gentleman. And there's an end of it."

"But there is not an end of it, sir," returned the Father. "But there shall not be an end of it. You have made up your mind? You have made up your mind?"

"Yes, *I* have. What's the good of keeping on like that?"

"Because," returned the Father in a great heat, "you had no right to make up your mind to what is monstrous, to what is — ha — immoral, to what is — hum — parricidal. No, Mr. Clennam, I beg, sir. Don't ask me to desist; there is a — hum — a general principle involved here, which rises even above considerations of — ha — hospitality. I object to the assertion made by my son. I — ha — I personally repel it."

"Why, what is it to you, father?" returned the son over his shoulder.

"What is it to me, sir? I have a — hum — a spirit, sir, that will not endure it. I" — he took out his pocket-handkerchief again, and dabbed his face — "I am outraged and insulted by it. Let me suppose the case that I myself may at a certain time — ha — or times, have made a — hum — an appeal, and a properly worded appeal, and a delicate appeal, and an urgent appeal, to some individual for a small temporary accommodation. Let me suppose that that accommodation could have been easily extended, and was not extended, and that that individual informed me that he begged to be excused. Am I to be told by my own son that I therefore received treatment not due to a gentleman, and that I — ha — I submitted to it?"

His daughter Amy gently tried to calm him, but he would not on any account be calmed. He said his spirit was up, and wouldn't endure this.

Was he to be told that, he wished to know again, by his own son, on his own hearth, to his own face? Was that humiliation to be put upon him by his own blood?

"You are putting it on yourself, father, and getting into all this injury of your own accord," said the young gentleman morosely. "What I have made up my mind about has nothing to do with you. What I said had nothing to do with you. Why need you go trying on other people's hats?"

"I reply, it has everything to do with me," returned the Father. "I point out to you, sir, with indignation, that — hum — the — ha delicacy and peculiarity of your father's position should strike you dumb, sir, if nothing else should, in laying down such — ha — such unnatural principles. Besides, if you are not filial, sir, if you discard that duty, are you at least — hum — not a Christian? Are you — ha — an Atheist? And is it Christian, let me ask you, to stigmatize and denounce an individual for begging to be excused this time, when the same individual may — ha — respond with the same accommodation next time? Is it the part of a Christian not to — hum — not to try him again?" he had worked himself into quite a religious glow and fervor.

"I see precious well," said Mr. Tip, rising, "that I shall get no sensible or fair argument here tonight, and so the best thing I can do is to cut. Good-night, Amy. Don't be vexed. I am very sorry it happens here, and you here, upon my soul

I am; but I can't altogether part with my spirit, even for your sake, old girl."

With those words he put on his hat and went out, accompanied by Miss Fanny; who did not consider it spirited on her part to take leave of Clennam with any less opposing demonstration than a stare, importing that she had always known him for one of the large body of conspirators.

When they were gone the Father of the Marshalsea was at first inclined to sink into despondency again, and would have done so, but that a gentleman opportunely came up within a minute or two to attend him to the Snuggery. It was the gentleman Clennam had seen on the night of his own accidental detention there, who had that impalpable grievance about the misappropriated Fund on which the Marshal was supposed to batten. He presented himself as a deputation to escort the Father to the Chair; it being an occasion on which he had promised to preside over the assembled collegians, in the enjoyment of a little Harmony.

"Such, you see, Mr. Clennam," said the Father, "are the incongruities of my position here. But a public duty! No man, I am sure, would more readily recognize a public duty than yourself."

Clennam besought him not to delay a moment.

"Amy, my dear, if you can persuade Mr. Clennam to stay longer, I can leave the honors of our poor apology for an establishment with confidence in your hands, and perhaps you may do something towards erasing from Mr. Clennam's mind the — ha — untoward and unpleasant circumstance which has occurred since tea-time."

Clennam assured him that it had made no im-

pression on his mind, and therefore required no erasure.

"My dear sir," said the Father, with a removal of his black cap, and a grasp of Clennam's hand, combining to express the safe receipt of his note and enclosure that afternoon, "Heaven ever bless you!"

So, at last, Clennam's purpose in remaining was attained, and he could speak to Little Dorrit with nobody by. Maggy counted as nobody, and she was by.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MORE FORTUNE-TELLING.

MAGGY sat at her work in her great white cap, with its quantity of opaque frilling hiding what profile she had (she had none to spare), and her serviceable eye brought to bear upon her occupation, on the window side of the room. What with her flapping cap, and what with her unserviceable eye, she was quite partitioned off from her Little Mother, whose seat was opposite the window. The tread and shuffle of feet on the pavement of the yard had much diminished since the taking of the Chair; the tide of collegians having set strongly in the direction of Harmony. Some few who had no music in their souls, or no money in their pockets, dawdled about; and the old spectacle of the visitor-wife and the depressed unseasoned prisoner still lingered in corners, as broken cobwebs and such unsightly discomforts draggle in corners of other places. It was the quietest time the college knew, saving the night hours when the collegians took the benefit of the act of sleep. The occasional rattle of applause upon the tables of the Snuggery denoted the successful termination of a morsel of Harmony; or the responsive acceptance,

by the united children, of some toast or sentiment offered to them by their Father. Occasionally a vocal strain more sonorous than the generality informed the listener that some boastful bass was in blue water, or in the hunting-field, or with the reindeer, or on the mountain, or among the heather; but the Marshal of the Marshalsea knew better, and had got him hard and fast.

As Arthur Clennam moved to sit down by the side of Little Dorrit, she trembled so that she had much ado to hold her needle. Clennam gently put his hand upon her work, and said, "Dear Little Dorrit, let me lay it down."

She yielded it to him, and he put it aside. Her hands were then nervously clasping together, but he took one of them.

"How seldom I have seen you lately, Little Dorrit!"

"I have been busy, sir."

"But I heard only to-day," said Clennam, "by mere accident, of your having been with those good people close by me. Why not come to me, then?"

"I — I don't know. Or rather, I thought you might be busy too. You generally are now, are you not?"

He saw her trembling little form and her downcast face, and the eyes that drooped the moment they were raised to his — he saw them almost with as much concern as tenderness.

"My child, your manner is so changed!"

The trembling was now quite beyond her control. Softly withdrawing her hand, and laying it in her other hand, she sat before him with her head bent, and her whole form trembling.

"My own Little Dorrit!" said Clennam compassionately.

She burst into tears, Maggy looked round of a sudden, and stared for at least a minute; but did not interpose. Clennam waited some little while before he spoke again.

"I cannot bear," he said then, "to see you weep; but I hope this is a relief to an overcharged heart."

"Yes, it is, sir. Nothing but that."

"Well, well! I feared you would think too much of what passed here just now. It is of no moment; not the least. I am only unfortunate to have come in the way. Let it go by with these tears. It is not worth one of them. One of them? Such an idle thing should be repeated, with my glad consent, fifty times a day, to save you a moment's heartache, Little Dorrit."

She had taken courage now, and answered, far more in her usual manner, "You are so good! But even if there was nothing else in it to be sorry for and ashamed of, it is such a bad return to you"—

"Hush!" said Clennam, smiling and touching her lips with his hand. "Forgetfulness in you, who remember so many and so much, would be new indeed. Shall I remind you that I am not, and that I never was, anything but the friend whom you agreed to trust? No. You remember it, don't you?"

"I try to do so, or I should have broken the promise just now, when my mistaken brother was here. You will consider his bringing-up in this place, and will not judge him hardly, poor fellow, I know!" In raising her eyes with these words, she observed his face more nearly than she had

done yet, and said, with a quick change of tone, "You have not been ill, Mr. Clennam?"

"No."

"Nor tried? Nor hurt?" she asked him anxiously.

It fell to Clennam, now, to be not quite certain how to answer. He said in reply: —

"To speak the truth, I have been a little troubled, but it is over. Do I show it so plainly? I ought to have more fortitude and self-command than that. I thought I had. I must learn them of you. Who could teach me better?"

He never thought that she saw in him what no one else could see. He never thought that in the whole world there were no other eyes that looked upon him with the same light and strength as hers.

"But it brings me to something that I wish to say," he continued, "and therefore I will not quarrel even with my own face for telling tales and being unfaithful to me. Besides, it is a privilege and pleasure to confide in my Little Dorrit. Let me confess, then, that, forgetting how grave I was, and how old I was, and how the time for such things had gone by me with the many years of sameness and little happiness that made up my long life far away, without marking it — that, forgetting all this, I fancied I loved some one."

"Do I know her, sir?" asked Little Dorrit.

"No, my child."

"Not the lady who has been kind to me for your sake?"

"Flora? No, no. Did you think" —

"I never quite thought so," said Little Dorrit, more to herself than him. "I did wonder at it a little."

"Well!" said Clennam, abiding by the feeling that had fallen on him in the avenue on the night of the roses, the feeling that he was an older man, who had done with that tender part of life, "I found out my mistake, and I thought about it a little — in short, a good deal — and got wiser. Being wiser, I counted up my years, and considered what I am, and looked back, and looked forward, and found that I should soon be gray. I found that I had climbed the hill, and passed the level ground upon the top, and was descending quickly."

If he had known the sharpness of the pain he caused the patient heart in speaking thus! While doing it, too, with the purpose of easing and serving her.

"I found that the day when any such thing would have been graceful in me, or good in me, or hopeful or happy for me, or any one in connection with me, was gone, and would never shine again."

Oh! If he had known, if he had known! If he could have seen the dagger in his hand, and the cruel wounds it struck in the faithful bleeding breast of his Little Dorrit!

"All that is over, and I have turned my face from it. Why do I speak of this to Little Dorrit? Why do I show you, my child, the space of years that there is between us, and recall to you that I have passed, by the amount of your whole life, the time that is present to you?"

"Because you trust me, I hope. Because you know that nothing can touch you without touching me; that nothing can make you happy or unhappy, but it must make me, who am so grateful to you, the same."

He heard the thrill in her voice, he saw her earnest face, he saw her clear true eyes, he saw the quickened bosom that would have joyfully thrown itself before him to receive a mortal wound directed at his breast, with the dying cry, "I love him!" and the remotest suspicion of the truth never dawned upon his mind. No. He saw the devoted little creature with her worn shoes, in her common dress, in her jail home; a slender child in body, a strong heroine in soul; and the light of her domestic story made all else dark to him.

"For those reasons assuredly, Little Dorrit, but for another too. So far removed, so different, and so much older, I am the better fitted for your friend and adviser. I mean, I am the more easily to be trusted; and any little constraint that you might feel with another may vanish before me. Why have you kept so retired from me? Tell me."

"I am better here. My place and use are here. I am much better here," said Little Dorrit faintly.

"So you said that day upon the bridge. I thought of it much afterwards. Have you no secret you could intrust to me with hope and comfort, if you would?"

"Secret! No, I have no secret," said Little Dorrit in some trouble.

They had been speaking in low voices; more because it was natural to what they said to adopt that tone, than with any care to reserve it from Maggy at her work. All of a sudden Maggy stared again, and this time spoke: —

"I say! Little Mother!"

"Yes, Maggy."

"If you ain't got no secret of your own to tell

him, tell him that about the Princess. *She* had a secret, you know."

"The Princess had a secret?" said Clennam in some surprise. "What Princess was that, Maggy?"

"Lor! How you do go and bother a gal of ten," said Maggy, "catching the poor thing up in that way! Whoever said the Princess had a secret? *I* never said so."

"I beg your pardon. I thought you did."

"No, I didn't. How could I, when it was her as wanted to find it out? It was the little woman as had the secret, and she was always a-spinning at her wheel. And so she says to her, why do you keep it there? And so the t'other one says to her, no, I don't; and so the t'other one says to her, yes, you do; and then they both goes to the cupboard, and there it is. And she wouldn't go into the hospital, and so she died. *You* know, Little Mother. Tell him that. For it was a reg'lar good secret, that was!" cried Maggy, hugging herself.

Arthur looked at little Dorrit for help to comprehend this, and was struck by seeing her so timid and red. But, when she told him that it was only a Fairy Tale she had one day made up for Maggy, and that there was nothing in it which she wouldn't be ashamed to tell again to anybody else, even if she could remember it, he left the subject where it was.

However, he returned to his own subject, by first entreating her to see him oftener, and to remember that it was impossible to have a stronger interest in her welfare than he had, or to be more set upon promoting it than he was. When she answered fervently, she well knew that, she never forgot it,

he touched upon his second and more delicate point — the suspicion he had formed.

"Little Dorrit," he said, taking her hand again, and speaking lower than he had spoken yet, so that even Maggy in the small room could not hear him, "another word. I have wanted very much to say this to you; I have tried for opportunities. Don't mind me, who, for the matter of years, might be your father or your uncle. Always think of me as quite an old man. I know that all your devotion centres in this room, and that nothing to the last will ever tempt you away from the duties you discharge here. If I were not sure of it, I should, before now, have implored you, and implored your father, to let me make some provision for you in a more suitable place. But, you may have an interest — I will not say now, though even that might be — may have, at another time, an interest in some one else; an interest not incompatible with your affection here."

She was very, very pale, and silently shook her head.

"It may be, dear Little Dorrit."

"No. No. No." She shook her head, after each slow repetition of the word, with an air of quiet desolation that he remembered long afterwards. The time came when he remembered it well, long afterwards, within those prison walls; within that very room.

"But, if it ever should be, tell me so, my dear child. Intrust the truth to me, point out the object of such an interest to me, and I will try with all the zeal, and honor, and friendship, and respect that I feel for you, good Little Dorrit of my heart, to do you a lasting service."

"Oh, thank you, thank you! But, oh no, oh no, oh no!" She said this looking at him with her work-worn hands folded together, and in the same resigned accents as before.

"I press for no confidence now. I only ask you to repose unhesitating trust in me."

"Can I do less than that, when you are so good?"

"Then you will trust me fully? Will have no secret unhappiness, or anxiety, concealed from me?"

"Almost none."

"And you have none now?"

She shook her head. But she was very pale.

"When I lie down to-night, and my thoughts come back — as they will, for they do every night, even when I have not seen you — to this sad place, I may believe that there is no grief beyond this room, now, and its usual occupants, which preys on Little Dorrit's mind?"

She seemed to catch at these words — that he remembered, too, long afterwards — and said, more brightly, "Yes, Mr. Clennam; yes, you may!"

The crazy staircase, usually not slow to give notice when any one was coming up or down, here creaked under a quick tread, and a further sound was heard upon it, as if a little steam-engine, with more steam than it knew what to do with, were working towards the room. As it approached, which it did very rapidly, it labored with increased energy; and, after knocking at the door, it sounded as if it were stooping down and snorting in at the keyhole.

Before Maggy could open the door, Mr. Pancks, opening it from without, stood without a hat and with his bare head in the wildest condition, looking

at Clennam and Little Dorrit over her shoulder. He had a lighted cigar in his hand, and brought with him airs of ale and tobacco-smoke.

"Pancks the gypsy," he observed, out of breath, "fortune-telling."

He stood dingily smiling, and breathing hard at them, with a most curious air. As if, instead of being his proprietor's grubber, he were the triumphant proprietor of the Marshalsea, the Marshal, all the turnkeys, and all the collegians. In his great self-satisfaction he put his cigar to his lips (being evidently no smoker), and took such a pull at it, with his right eye shut up tight for the purpose, that he underwent a convulsion of shuddering and choking. But, even in the midst of that paroxysm, he still essayed to repeat his favorite introduction of himself, "Pa-ancks the gy-ypsy, fortune-telling."

"I am spending the evening with the rest of 'em," said Pancks. "I've been singing. I've been taking a part in White sand and gray sand. *I* don't know anything about it. Never mind. I'll take any part in anything. It's all the same if you're loud enough."

At first Clennam supposed him to be intoxicated. But, he soon perceived that though he might be a little the worse (or better) for ale, the staple of his excitement was not brewed from malt, or distilled from any grain or berry.

"How d'ye do, Miss Dorrit?" said Pancks. "I thought you wouldn't mind my running round, and looking in for a moment. Mr. Clennam I heard was here from Mr. Dorrit. How are you, sir?"

Clennam thanked him, and said he was glad to see him so gay.

"Gay!" said Pancks. "I'm in wonderful feather, sir. I can't stop a minute, or I shall be missed, and I don't want 'em to miss me. — Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

He seemed to have an insatiate delight in appealing to her, and looking at her; excitedly sticking his hair up at the same moment, like a dark species of cockatoo.

"I haven't been here half an hour. I knew Mr. Dorrit was in the chair, and I said, 'I'll go and support him!' I ought to be down in Bleeding Heart Yard by rights; but I can worry them tomorrow. — Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

His little black eyes sparkled electrically. His very hair seemed to sparkle as he roughened it. He was in that highly charged state that one might have expected to draw sparks and snaps from him by presenting a knuckle to any part of his figure.

"Capital company here," said Pancks. — "Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

She was half afraid of him, and irresolute what to say. He laughed, with a nod towards Clennam.

"Don't mind him, Miss Dorrit. He's one of us. We agreed that you shouldn't take on to mind me before people, but we didn't mean Mr. Clennam. He's one of us. He's in it. Ain't you, Mr. Clennam? — Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

The excitement of this strange creature was fast communicating itself to Clennam. Little Dorrit, with amazement, saw this, and observed that they exchanged quick looks.

"I was making a remark," said Pancks, "but I declare I forget what it was. Oh, I know! Capital company here. I've been treating them all round. — Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

"Very generous of you," she returned, noticing another of the quick looks between the two.

"Not at all," said Pancks. "Don't mention it. I'm coming into my property, that's the fact. I can afford to be liberal. I think I'll give 'em a treat here. Tables laid in the yard. Bread in stacks. Pipes in fagots. Tobacco in hayloads. Roast beef and plum-pudding for every one. Quart of double stout a head. Pint of wine too, if they like it, and the authorities give permission. — Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

She was thrown into such a confusion by his manner, or rather by Clennam's growing understanding of his manner (for she looked to him after every fresh appeal and cockatoo demonstration on the part of Mr. Pancks), that she only moved her lips in answer, without forming any word.

"And oh, by the by!" said Pancks. "You were to live to know what was behind us on that little hand of yours. And so you shall, you shall, my darling. — Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

He had suddenly checked himself. Where he got all the additional black prongs from, that now flew up all over his head, like the myriads of points that break out in the large change of a great firework, was a wonderful mystery.

"But I shall be missed;" he came back to that; "and I don't want 'em to miss me. Mr. Clennam, you and I made a bargain. I said you should find me stick to it. You shall find me stick to it now, sir, if you'll step out of the room a moment. Miss Dorrit, I wish you good-night. Miss Dorrit, I wish you good fortune."

He rapidly shook her by both hands, and puffed down-stairs. Arthur followed him with such a hurried step, that he had very nearly tumbled over him on the last landing, and rolled him down into the yard.

"What is it, for Heaven's sake?" Arthur demanded when they burst out there both together.

"Stop a moment, sir. Mr. Rugg. Let me introduce him."

With those words he presented another man without a hat, and also with a cigar, and also surrounded with a halo of ale and tobacco-smoke, which man, though not so excited as himself, was in a state which would have been akin to lunacy but for its fading into sober method when compared with the rampancy of Mr. Pancks.

"Mr. Clennam, Mr. Rugg," said Pancks. "Stop a moment. Come to the pump."

They adjourned to the pump. Mr. Pancks, instantly putting his head under the spout, requested Mr. Rugg to take a good strong turn at the handle. Mr. Rugg complying to the letter, Mr. Pancks came forth snorting and blowing to some purpose, and dried himself on his handkerchief.

"I am the clearer for that," he gasped to Clennam, standing astonished. "But, upon my soul, to hear her father making speeches in that chair, knowing what we know, and to see her up in that room in that dress, knowing what we know, is enough to — give me a back, Mr. Rugg — a little higher, sir — that'll do!"

Then and there, on that Marshalsea pavement, in the shades of evening, did Mr. Pancks, of all mankind, fly over the head and shoulders of Mr. Rugg

of Pentonville, General Agent, Accountant, and Recoverer of Debts. Alighting on his feet he took Clennam by the button-hole, led him behind the pump, and pantingly produced from his pocket a bundle of papers.

Mr. Rugg, also, pantingly produced from his pocket a bundle of papers.

"Stay!" said Clennam in a whisper. "You have made a discovery."

Mr. Pancks answered, with an unction which there is no language to convey, "We rather think so."

"Does it implicate any one?"

"How implicate, sir?"

"In any suppression, or wrong dealing of any kind?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Thank God!" said Clennam to himself. "Now show me."

"You are to understand" — snorted Pancks, feverishly unfolding papers, and speaking in short, high-pressure blasts of sentences. "Where's the Pedigree? Where's Schedule number four, Mr. Rugg? Oh! all right! Here we are. — You are to understand that we are this very day virtually complete. We sha'n't be legally for a day or two. Call it at the outside a week. We've been at it, night and day, for I don't know how long. Mr. Rugg, you know how long? Never mind. Don't say. You'll only confuse me. You shall tell her, Mr. Clennam. Not till we give you leave. Where's that rough total, Mr. Rugg? Oh! Here we are! There, sir! That's what you'll have to break to her. That man's your Father of the Marshalsea!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MRS. MERDLE'S COMPLAINT.

Resigning herself to inevitable fate, by making the best of those people the Miggleses, and submitting her philosophy to the draft upon it, of which she had foreseen the likelihood in her interview with Arthur, Mrs. Gowan handsomely resolved not to oppose her son's marriage. In her progress to, and happy arrival at, this resolution, she was possibly influenced, not only by her maternal affections, but by three politic considerations.

Of these, the first may have been, that her son had never signified the smallest intention to ask her consent, or any mistrust of his ability to dispense with it; the second, that the pension bestowed upon her by a grateful country (and a Barnacle) would be freed from any little filial inroads, when her Henry should be married to the darling only child of a man in very easy circumstances; the third, that Henry's debts must clearly be paid down upon the altar-railing by his father-in-law. When, to these threefold points of prudence, there is added the fact that Mrs. Gowan yielded her consent the moment she knew of Mr. Meagles having yielded his, and that Mr. Meagles's objection to the marriage had

been the sole obstacle in its way all along, it becomes the height of probability that the relict of the deceased Commissioner of nothing particular turned these ideas in her sagacious mind.

Among her connections and acquaintances, however, she maintained her individual dignity, and the dignity of the blood of the Barnacles, by diligently nursing the pretence that it was a most unfortunate business; that she was sadly cut up by it; that this was a perfect fascination under which Henry labored; that she had opposed it for a long time, but what could a mother do? and the like. She had already called Arthur Clennam to bear witness to this fable, as a friend of the Meagles family; and she followed up the move by now impounding the family itself for the same purpose. In the first interview she accorded to Mr. Meagles, she slided herself into the position of disconsolately but gracefully yielding to irresistible pressure. With the utmost politeness and good-breeding, she feigned that it was she — not he — who had made the difficulty, and who at length gave way; and that the sacrifice was hers — not his. The same feint, with the same polite dexterity, she foisted on Mrs. Meagles, as a conjurer might have forced a card on that innocent lady; and when her future daughter-in-law was presented to her by her son, she said, on embracing her, "My dear, what have you done to Henry that has bewitched him so?" at the same time allowing a few tears to carry before them, in little pills, the cosmetic powder on her nose; as a delicate but touching signal that she suffered much inwardly, for the show of composure with which she bore her misfortune.

Among the friends of Mrs. Gowan (who piqued herself at once on being Society, and on maintaining intimate and easy relations with that Power), Mrs. Merdle occupied a front row. True, the Hampton-Court Bohemians, without exception, turned up their noses at Merdle as an upstart; but they turned them down again by falling flat on their faces to worship his wealth. In which compensating adjustment of their noses they were pretty much like Treasury, and Bar, Bishop, and all the rest of them.

To Mrs. Merdle Mrs. Gowan repaired on a visit of self-condolence, after having given the gracious consent aforesaid. She drove into town for the purpose in a one-horse carriage, irreverently called, at that period of English history, a pill-box. It belonged to a job-master in a small way, who drove it himself, and who jobbed it by the day, or hour, to most of the old ladies in Hampton-Court Palace; but it was a point of ceremony, in that encampment, that the whole equipage should be tacitly regarded as the private property of the jobber for the time being, and that the job-master should betray personal knowledge of nobody but the jobber in possession. So, the Circumlocution Barnacles, who were the largest job-masters in the universe, always pretended to know of no other job but the job immediately in hand.

Mrs. Merdle was at home, and was in her nest of crimson and gold, with the parrot on a neighboring stem watching her with his head on one side, as if he took her for another splendid parrot of a larger species. To whom entered Mrs. Gowan, with her favorite green fan, which softened the light on the spots of bloom.

"My dear soul," said Mrs. Gowan, tapping the back of her friend's hand with this fan, after a little indifferent conversation, "you are my only comfort. That affair of Henry's, that I told you of, is to take place. Now, how does it strike you? I am dying to know, because you represent and express Society so well."

Mrs. Merdle reviewed the bosom which Society was accustomed to review; and, having ascertained that show-window of Mr. Merdle's and the London jewellers to be in good order, replied, —

"As to marriage on the part of a man, my dear, Society requires that he should retrieve his fortunes by marriage. Society requires that he should gain by marriage. Society requires that he should found a handsome establishment by marriage. Society does not see, otherwise, what he has to do with marriage. Bird, be quiet!"

For, the parrot on his cage above them, presiding over the conference as if he were a Judge (and indeed he looked rather like one), had wound up the exposition with a shriek.

"Cases there are," said Mrs. Merdle, delicately crooking the little finger of her favorite hand, and making her remarks neater by that neat action; "cases there are where a man is not young or elegant, and is rich, and has a handsome establishment already. Those are of a different kind. In such cases" —

Mrs. Merdle shrugged her snowy shoulders, and put her hand upon the jewel-stand, checking a little cough, as though to add, "Why, a man looks out for this sort of thing, my dear." Then the parrot shrieked again, and she put up her glass to look at him, and said, "Bird! Do be quiet!"

"But, young men," resumed Mrs. Merdle, "and by young men you know what I mean, my love — I mean people's sons who have the world before them — they must place themselves in a better position towards Society by marriage, or Society really will not have any patience with their making fools of themselves. Dreadfully worldly all this sounds," said Mrs. Merdle, leaning back in her nest and putting up her glass again, "does it not?"

"But it is true," said Mrs. Gowan with a highly moral air.

"My dear, it is not to be disputed for a moment," returned Mrs. Merdle; "because Society has made up its mind on the subject, and there is nothing more to be said. If we were in a more primitive state, if we lived under roofs of leaves, and kept cows and sheep and creatures instead of bankers' accounts (which would be delicious; my dear, I am pastoral to a degree, by nature), well and good. But we don't live under leaves, and keep cows and sheep and creatures. I perfectly exhaust myself sometimes in pointing out the distinction to Edmund Sparkler."

Mrs. Gowan, looking over her green fan when this young gentleman's name was mentioned, replied as follows: —

"My love, you know the wretched state of the country — those unfortunate concessions of John Barnacle's! — and you therefore know the reasons for my being as poor as Thingummy."

"A Church mouse?" Mrs. Merdle suggested with a smile.

"I was thinking of the other proverbial Church person — Job," said Mrs. Gowan. "Either will do.

It would be idle to disguise, consequently, that there is a wide difference between the position of your son and mine. I may add, too, that Henry has talent" —

"Which Edmund certainly has not," said Mrs. Merdle with the greatest suavity.

"— And that his talent, combined with disappointment," Mrs. Gowan went on, "has led him into a pursuit which — ah dear me! *You* know, my dear. Such being Henry's different position, the question is, what is the most inferior class of marriage to which I can reconcile myself?"

Mrs. Merdle was so much engaged with the contemplation of her arms (beautiful-formed arms, and the very thing for bracelets), that she omitted to reply for a-while. Roused at length by the silence, she folded the arms, and with admirable presence of mind looked her friend full in the face, and said interrogatively, "Ye-es? And then?"

"And then, my dear," said Mrs. Gowan, not quite so sweetly as before, "I should be glad to hear what you have to say to it."

Here the parrot, who had been standing on one leg since he screamed last, burst into a fit of laughter, bobbed himself derisively up and down on both legs, and finished by standing on one leg again, and pausing for a reply, with his head as much awry as he could possibly twist it.

"Sounds mercenary to ask what the gentleman is to get with the lady," said Mrs. Merdle; "but Society *is* perhaps a little mercenary you know, my dear."

"From what I can make out," said Mrs. Gowan, "I believe I may say that Henry will be relieved from debt" —

"Much in debt?" asked Mrs. Merdle through her eye-glass.

"Why, tolerably, I should think," said Mrs. Gowan.

"Meaning the usual thing; I understand; just so," Mrs. Merdle observed in a comfortable sort of way.

"And that the father will make them an allowance of three hundred a year, or perhaps, altogether, something more. Which, in Italy" —

"Oh! Going to Italy?" said Mrs. Merdle.

"For Henry to study. You need be at no loss to guess why, my dear. That dreadful Art" —

True. Mrs. Merdle hastened to spare the feelings of her afflicted friend. She understood. Say no more!

"And that," said Mrs. Gowan, shaking her despondent head, "that's all. That," repeated Mrs. Gowan, furling her green fan for the moment, and tapping her chin with it (it was on the way to being a double chin; might be called a chin and a half at present), "that's all! On the death of the old people, I suppose there will be more to come; but how it may be restricted or locked up I don't know. And, as to that, they may live forever. My dear, they are just the kind of people to do it."

Now, Mrs. Merdle, who really knew her friend Society pretty well, and who knew what Society's mothers were, and what Society's daughters were, and what Society's matrimonial market was, and how prices ruled in it, and what scheming and counter-scheming took place for the high buyers, and what bargaining and huckstering went on, thought in the depths of her capacious bosom that this was a

sufficiently good catch. Knowing, however, what was expected of her, and perceiving the exact nature of the fiction to be nursed, she took it delicately in her arms, and put her required contribution of gloss upon it.

"And that is all, my dear?" said she, heaving a friendly sigh. "Well, well! The fault is not yours. You have nothing to reproach yourself with. You must exercise the strength of mind for which you are renowned, and make the best of it."

"The girl's family have made," said Mrs. Gowan, "of course the most strenuous endeavors to — as the lawyers say — to have and to hold Henry."

"Of course they have, my dear," said Mrs. Merdle.

"I have persisted in every possible objection, and have worried myself morning, noon, and night, for means to detach Henry from the connection."

"No doubt you have, my dear," said Mrs. Merdle.

"And all of no use. All has broken down beneath me. Now tell me, my love. Am I justified in at last yielding my most reluctant consent to Henry's marrying among people not in Society; or, have I acted with inexcusable weakness?"

In answer to this direct appeal, Mrs. Merdle assured Mrs. Gowan (speaking as a Priestess of Society) that she was highly to be commended, that she was much to be sympathized with, that she had taken the highest of parts, and had come out of the furnace refined. And Mrs. Gowan, who of course saw through her own threadbare blind perfectly, and who knew that Mrs. Merdle saw through it perfectly, and who knew that Society would see through it perfectly, came out of this form, notwithstanding, as she had gone into it, with immense complacency and gravity.

The conference was held at four or five o'clock in the afternoon, when all the region of Harley Street, Cavendish Square, was resonant of carriage-wheels and double knocks. It had reached this point when Mr. Merdle came home from his daily occupation of causing the British name to be more and more respected in all parts of the civilized globe, capable of the appreciation of world-wide commercial enterprise and gigantic combinations of skill and capital. For, though nobody knew with the least precision what Mr. Merdle's business was, except that it was to coin money, these were the terms in which everybody defined it on all ceremonious occasions, and which it was the last new polite reading of the parable of the camel and the needle's eye to accept without inquiry.

For a gentleman who had this splendid work cut out for him, Mr. Merdle looked a little common, and rather as if, in the course of his vast transactions, he had accidentally made an interchange of heads with some inferior spirit. He presented himself before the two ladies in the course of a dismal stroll through his mansion, which had no apparent object but escape from the presence of the chief butler.

"I beg your pardon," he said, stopping short in confusion; "I didn't know there was anybody here but the parrot."

However, as Mrs. Merdle said, "You can come in!" and as Mrs. Gowan said she was just going, and had already risen to take her leave, he came in, and stood looking out at a distant window, with his hands crossed under his uneasy coat-cuffs, clasping his wrists as if he were taking himself into custody.

In this attitude he fell directly into a revery, from which he was only aroused by his wife's calling to him from her ottoman, when they had been for some quarter of an hour alone.

"Eh? Yes?" said Mr. Merdle, turning towards her. "What is it?"

"What is it?" repeated Mrs. Merdle. "It is, I suppose, that you have not heard a word of my complaint."

"Your complaint, Mrs. Merdle?" said Mr. Merdle. "I didn't know that you were suffering from a complaint. What complaint?"

"A complaint of you," said Mrs. Merdle.

"Oh! A complaint of me," said Mr. Merdle. "What is the — what have I — what may you have to complain of in me, Mrs. Merdle?"

In his withdrawing, abstracted, pondering way, it took him some time to shape this question. As a kind of faint attempt to convince himself that he was the master of the house, he concluded by presenting his forefinger to the parrot, who expressed his opinion on that subject by instantly driving his bill into it.

"You were saying, Mrs. Merdle," said Mr. Merdle, with his wounded finger in his mouth, "that you had a complaint against me?"

"A complaint which I could scarcely show the justice of more emphatically than by having to repeat it," said Mrs. Merdle. "I might as well have stated it to the wall. I had far better have stated it to the bird. He would at least have screamed."

"You don't want me to scream, Mrs. Merdle, I suppose," said Mr. Merdle, taking a chair.

"Indeed, I don't know," retorted Mrs. Merdle, "but that you had better do that than be so moody and distraught. One would at least know that you were sensible of what was going on around you."

"A man might scream, and yet not be that, Mrs. Merdle," said Mr. Merdle heavily.

"And might be dogged, as you are at present, without screaming," returned Mrs. Merdle. "That's very true. If you wish to know the complaint I make against you, it is, in so many plain words, that you really ought not to go into Society, unless you can accommodate yourself to Society." Mr. Merdle, so twisting his hands into what hair he had upon his head that he seemed to lift himself up by it as he started out of his chair, cried, —

"Why, in the name of all the infernal powers, Mrs. Merdle, who does more for Society than I do? Do you see these premises, Mrs. Merdle? Do you see this furniture, Mrs. Merdle? Do you look in the glass and see yourself, Mrs. Merdle? Do you know the cost of all this, and who it's all provided for? And yet will you tell me that I oughtn't to go into Society? I, who shower money upon it in this way? I, who might be almost said — to — to — to harness myself to a watering-cart full of money, and go about saturating Society every day of my life?"

"Pray don't be violent, Mr. Merdle," said Mrs. Merdle.

"Violent!" said Mr. Merdle. "You are enough to make me desperate. You don't know half of what I do to accommodate Society. You don't know anything of the sacrifices I make for it."

"I know," returned Mrs. Merdle, "that you receive the best in the land. I know that you move

in the whole Society of the country. And I believe I know (indeed, not to make any ridiculous pretence about it, I know I know) who sustains you in it, Mr. Merdle."

"Mrs. Merdle!" retorted that gentleman, wiping his dull red and yellow face. "I know that as well as you do. If you were not an ornament to Society, and if I was not a benefactor to Society, you and I would never have come together. When I say a benefactor to it, I mean a person who provides it with all sorts of expensive things to eat and drink and look at. But, to tell me that I am not fit for it after all I have done for it," — repeated Mr. Merdle with a wild emphasis that made his wife lift up her eyelids, "after all — all! — to tell me I have no right to mix with it after all, is a pretty reward."

"I say," answered Mrs. Merdle composedly, "that you ought to make yourself fit for it by being more *dégagé*, and less preoccupied. There is a positive vulgarity in carrying your business affairs about with you as you do."

"How do I carry them about, Mrs. Merdle?" asked Mr. Merdle.

"How do you carry them about?" said Mrs. Merdle. "Look at yourself in the glass."

Mr. Merdle involuntarily turned his eyes in the direction of the nearest mirror, and asked, with a slow determination of his turbid blood to his temples, whether a man was to be called to account for his digestion?

"You have a physician," said Mrs. Merdle.

"He does me no good," said Mr. Merdle.

Mrs. Merdle changed her ground.

"Besides," said she, "your digestion is nonsense.

I don't speak of your digestion. I speak of your manner."

"Mrs. Merdle," returned her husband, "I look to you for that. You supply manner, and I supply money."

"I don't expect you," said Mrs. Merdle, reposing easily among her cushions, "to captivate people. I don't want you to take any trouble upon yourself, or to try to be fascinating. I simply request you to care about nothing — or to seem to care about nothing — as everybody else does."

"Do I ever say I care about anything?" asked Mr. Merdle.

"Say? No! Nobody would attend to you if you did. But you show it."

"Show what? What do I show?" demanded Mr. Merdle hurriedly.

"I have already told you. You show that you carry your business cares and projects about, instead of leaving them in the City, or wherever else they belong to," said Mrs. Merdle. "Or seeming to. Seeming would be quite enough: I ask no more. Whereas you couldn't be more occupied with your day's calculations and combinations than you habitually show yourself to be, if you were a carpenter."

"A carpenter!" repeated Mr. Merdle, checking something like a groan. "I shouldn't so much mind being a carpenter, Mrs. Merdle."

"And my complaint is," pursued the lady, disregarding the low remark, "that it is not the tone of Society, and that you ought to correct it, Mr. Merdle. If you have any doubt of my judgment, ask even Edmund Sparkler." The door of the room had opened, and Mrs. Merdle now surveyed the head of

her son through her glass. "Edmund, we want you here."

Mr. Sparkler, who had merely put in his head and looked round the room without entering (as if he were searching the house for that young lady with no nonsense about her), upon this followed up his head with his body, and stood before them. To whom, in a few easy words adapted to his capacity, Mrs. Merdle stated the question at issue.

The young gentleman, after anxiously feeling his shirt-collar as if it were his pulse, and he were hypochondriacal, observed, "That he had heard it noticed by fellers."

"Edmund Sparkler has heard it noticed," said Mrs. Merdle with languid triumph. "Why, no doubt everybody has heard it noticed!" Which in truth was no unreasonable inference; seeing that Mr. Sparkler would probably be the last person, in any assemblage of the human species, to receive an impression from anything that passed in his presence.

"And Edmund Sparkler will tell you, I dare say," said Mrs. Merdle, waving her favorite hand towards her husband, "how he has heard it noticed."

"I couldn't," said Mr. Sparkler after feeling his pulse as before, "couldn't undertake to say what led to it — 'cause memory desperate loose. But being in company with the brother of a doosed fine gal — well educated too — with no biggodd nonsense about her — at the period alluded to" —

"There! Never mind the sister," remarked Mrs. Merdle a little impatiently. "What did the brother say?"

"Didn't say a word, ma'am," answered Mr.

Sparkler. "As silent a feller as myself. Equally hard up for a remark."

"Somebody said something," returned Mrs. Merdle. "Never mind who it was."

("Assure you I don't in the least," said Mr. Sparkler.)

"But tell us what it was."

Mr. Sparkler referred to his pulse again, and put himself through some severe mental discipline before he replied, —

"Fellers referring to my Governor — expression not my own — occasionally compliment my Governor in a very handsome way on being immensely rich and knowing — perfect phenomenon of Buyer and Banker and that — but say the Shop sits heavily on him. Say he carries the Shop about on his back rather — like Jew clothesman with too much business."

"Which," said Mrs. Merdle, rising, with her floating drapery about her, "is exactly my complaint. Edmund, give me your arm up-stairs."

Mr. Merdle, left alone to meditate on a better conformation of himself to Society, looked out of nine windows in succession, and appeared to see nine wastes of space. When he had thus entertained himself he went down-stairs, and looked intently at all the carpets on the ground-floor; and then came up-stairs again, and looked intently at all the carpets on the first floor; as if they were gloomy depths, in unison with his oppressed soul. Through all the rooms he wandered, as he always did, like the last person on earth who had any business to approach them. Let Mrs. Merdle announce, with all her might, that she was at Home

ever so many nights in a season, she could not announce more widely and unmistakably than Mr. Merdle did that he was never at home.

At last he met the chief butler, the sight of which splendid retainer always finished him. Extinguished by this great creature, he sneaked to his dressing-room, and there remained shut up until he rode out to dinner, with Mrs. Merdle, in her own handsome chariot. At dinner he was envied and flattered as a being of might, was Treasuried, Barred, and Bishoped as much as he would; and an hour after midnight came home alone, and being instantly put out again in his own hall, like a rushlight, by the chief butler, went sighing to bed.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SHOAL OF BARNACLES.

Mr. Henry Gowan and the dog were established frequenters of the cottage, and the day was fixed for the wedding. There was to be a convocation of Barnacles on the occasion; in order that that very high and very large family might shed as much lustre on the marriage as so dim an event was capable of receiving.

To have got the whole Barnacle family together would have been impossible for two reasons. Firstly, because no building could have held all the members and connections of that illustrious house. Secondly, because wherever there was a square yard of ground in British occupation, under the sun or moon, with a public post upon it, sticking to that post was a Barnacle. No intrepid navigator could plant a flagstaff upon any spot of earth, and take possession of it in the British name, but to that spot of earth, so soon as the discovery was known, the Circumlocution Office sent out a Barnacle and a despatch-box. Thus the Barnacles were all over the world, in every direction — despatch-boxing the compass.

But, while the so-potent art of Prospero himself

would have failed in summoning the Barnacles from every speck of ocean and dry land on which there was nothing (except mischief) to be done, and anything to be pocketed, it was perfectly feasible to assemble a good many Barnacles. This Mrs. Gowan applied herself to do; calling on Mr. Meagles frequently, with new additions to the list, and holding conferences with that gentleman when he was not engaged (as he generally was at this period) in examining and paying the debts of his future son-in-law, in the apartment of the scales and scoop.

One marriage guest there was, in reference to whose presence Mr. Meagles felt a nearer interest and concern than in the attendance of the most elevated Barnacle expected; though he was far from insensible of the honor of having such company. This guest was Clennam. But Clennam had made a promise he held sacred, among the trees that summer night, and in the chivalry of his heart, regarded it as binding him to many implied obligations. In forgetfulness of himself, and delicate service to her on all occasions, he was never to fail: to begin it, he answered Mr. Meagles cheerfully, "I shall come, of course."

His partner, Daniel Doyce, was something of a stumbling-block in Mr. Meagles's way, the worthy gentleman being not at all clear in his own anxious mind but that the mingling of Daniel with official Barnacleism might produce some explosive combination, even at a marriage breakfast. The national offender, however, lightened him of his uneasiness by coming down to Twickenham to represent that he begged, with the freedom of an old friend, and as a favor to one, that he might not be invited.

"For," said he, "as my business with this set of gentlemen was to do a public duty and a public service, and as their business with me was to prevent it by wearing my soul out, I think we had better not eat and drink together with a show of being of one mind." Mr. Meagles was much amused by his friend's oddity; and patronized him with a more protecting air of allowance than usual when he rejoined: "Well, well, Dan, you shall have your own crotchety way."

To Mr. Henry Gowan, as the time approached, Clennam tried to convey, by all quiet and unpretending means, that he was frankly and disinterestedly desirous of tendering him any friendship he would accept. Mr. Gowan treated him in return with his usual ease, and with his usual show of confidence, which was no confidence at all.

"You see, Clennam," he happened to remark in the course of conversation one day, when they were walking near the cottage within a week of the marriage, "I am a disappointed man. That you know already."

"Upon my word," said Clennam, a little embarrassed, "I scarcely know how."

"Why," returned Gowan, "I belong to a clan, or a clique, or a family, or a connection, or whatever you like to call it, that might have provided for me in any one of fifty ways, and that took it into its head not to do it at all. So here I am a poor devil of an artist."

Clennam was beginning, "But, on the other hand"—when Gowan took him up.

"Yes, yes, I know. I have the good fortune of being beloved by a beautiful and charming girl whom I love with all my heart."

("Is there much of it?" Clennam thought. And as he thought it, felt ashamed of himself.)

"And of finding a father-in-law who is a capital fellow and a liberal good old boy. Still, I had other prospects washed and combed into my childish head when it was washed and combed for me, and I took them to a public school when I washed and combed it for myself, and I am here without them, and thus I am a disappointed man."

Clennam thought (and, as he thought it, again felt ashamed of himself), was this notion of being disappointed in life an assertion of station which the bridegroom brought into the family as his property, having already carried it detrimentally into his pursuit? And was it a hopeful or a promising thing anywhere?

"Not bitterly disappointed, I think," he said aloud.

"Hang it, no; not bitterly," laughed Gowan. "My people are not worth that — though they are charming fellows, and I have the greatest affection for them. Besides, it's pleasant to show them that I can do without them, and that they may all go to the devil. And besides again, most men are disappointed in life, somehow or other, and influenced by their disappointment. But it's a dear good world, and I love it!"

"It lies fair before you now," said Arthur.

"Fair as this summer river," cried the other with enthusiasm, "and, by Jove, I glow with admiration of it, and with ardor to run a race in it. It's the best of old worlds! And my calling! The best of old callings, isn't it?"

"Full of interest and ambition, I conceive," said Clennam.

"And imposition," added Gowan, laughing; "we won't leave out the imposition. I hope I may not break down in that; but there, my being a disappointed man may show itself. I may not be able to face it out bravely enough. Between you and me, I think there is some danger of my being just enough soured not to be able to do that."

"To do what?" asked Clennam.

"To keep it up. To help myself in my turn, as the man before me helps himself in his, and pass the bottle of smoke. To keep up the pretence as to labor, and study, and patience, and being devoted to my art, and giving up many solitary days to it, and abandoning many pleasures for it, and living in it, and all the rest of it — in short, to pass the bottle of smoke according to rule."

"But it is well for a man to respect his own vocation, whatever it is; and to think himself bound to uphold it, and to claim for it the respect it deserves; is it not?" Arthur reasoned. "And your vocation, Gowan, may really demand this suit and service, I confess I should have thought that all art did."

"What a good fellow you are, Clennam!" exclaimed the other, stopping to look at him, as if with irrepressible admiration. "What a capital fellow! *You* have never been disappointed. That's easy to see."

It would have been so cruel if he had meant it, that Clennam firmly resolved to believe he did not mean it. Gowan, without pausing, laid his hand upon his shoulder, and laughingly and lightly went on, —

"Clennam, I don't like to dispel your generous visions, and I would give any money (if I had any)

to live in such a rose-colored mist. But what I do in my trade, I do to sell. What all we fellows do, we do to sell. If we didn't want to sell it for the most we can get for it, we shouldn't do it. Being work, it has to be done; but it's easily enough done. All the rest is hocus-pocus. Now here's one of the advantages, or disadvantages, of knowing a disappointed man. You hear the truth."

Whatever he had heard, and whether it deserved that name or another, it sank into Clennam's mind. It so took root there that he began to fear Henry Gowan would always be a trouble to him, and that so far he had gained little or nothing from the dismissal of Nobody, with all his inconsistencies, anxieties, and contradictions. He found a contest still always going on in his breast between his promise to keep Gowan in none but good aspects before the mind of Mr. Meagles, and his enforced observation of Gowan in aspects that had no good in them. Nor could he quite support his own conscientious nature against misgivings that he distorted and discolored him, by reminding himself that he never sought those discoveries, and that he would have avoided them with willingness and great relief. For, he never could forget what had been; and he knew that he had once disliked Gowan, for no better reason than that he had come in his way.

Harassed by these thoughts, he now began to wish the marriage over, Gowan and his young wife gone, and himself left to fulfil his promise, and discharge the generous function he had accepted. This last week was, in truth, an uneasy interval for the whole house. Before Pet, or before Gowan, Mr. Meagles was radiant; but, Clennam had more than once

found him alone, with his view of the scales and scoop much blurred, and had often seen him look after the lovers, in the garden or elsewhere when he was not seen by them, with the old clouded face on which Gowan had fallen like a shadow. In the arrangement of the house for the great occasion, many little reminders of the old travels of the father and mother and daughter had to be disturbed, and passed from hand to hand; and sometimes, in the midst of these mute witnesses to the life they had had together, even Pet herself would yield to lamenting and weeping. Mrs. Meagles, the blithest and busiest of mothers, went about singing and cheering everybody; but she, honest soul, had her flights into store-rooms, where she would cry until her eyes were red, and would then come out, attributing that appearance to pickled onions and pepper, and singing clearer than ever. Mrs. Tickit, finding no balsam for a wounded mind in Buchan's Domestic Medicine, suffered greatly from low spirits, and from moving recollections of Minnie's infancy. When the latter were powerful with her, she usually sent up secret messages importing that she was not in parlor condition as to her attire, and that she solicited a sight of "her child" in the kitchen; there, she would bless her child's face, and bless her child's heart, and hug her child, in a medley of tears and congratulations, chopping-boards, rolling-pins, and pie-crust, with the tenderness of an attached old servant, which is a very pretty tenderness indeed.

But, all days come that are to be; and the marriage-day was to be, and it came; and with it came all the Barnacles who were bidden to the feast.

There was Mr. Tite Barnacle, from the Circum-

locution Office and Mews Street, Grosvenor Square, with the expensive Mrs. Tite Barnacle *née* Stilt-stalking, who made the quarter-days so long in coming, and the three expensive Miss Tite Barnacles, double-loaded with accomplishments, and ready to go off, and yet not going off with the sharpness of flash and bang that might have been expected, but rather hanging fire. There was Barnacle Junior, also from the Circumlocution Office, leaving the Tonnage of the country, which he was somehow supposed to take under his protection, to look after itself, and, sooth to say, not at all impairing the efficiency of his protection by leaving it alone. There was the engaging young Barnacle, deriving from the sprightly side of the family, also from the Circumlocution Office, gayly and agreeably helping the occasion along, and treating it, in his sparkling way, as one of the official forms and fees of the Church Department of How not to do it. There were three other Young Barnacles, from three other offices, insipid to all the senses, and terribly in want of seasoning, doing the marriage as they would have "done" the Nile, Old Rome, the new singer, or Jerusalem.

But, there was greater game than this. There was Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle himself, in the odor of Circumlocution — with the very smell of Despatch-Boxes upon him. Yes, there was Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle, who had risen to official heights on the wings of one indignant idea, and that was, My Lords, that I am yet to be told that it behooves a Minister of this free country to set bounds to the philanthropy, to cramp the charity, to fetter the public spirit, to contract the enterprise,

to damp the independent self-reliance of its people. That was, in other words, that this great statesman was always yet to be told that it behooved the Pilot of the ship to do anything but prosper in the private loaf and fish trade ashore, the crew being able, by dint of hard pumping, to keep the ship above water without him. On this sublime discovery in the great art How not to do it, Lord Decimus had long sustained the highest glory of the Barnacle family; and let any ill-advised member of either House but try How to do it, by bringing in a Bill to do it, that Bill was as good as dead and buried when Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle rose up in his place, and solemnly said, soaring into indignant majesty as the Circumlocution cheering soared around him, that he was yet to be told, My Lords, that it behooved him, as the Minister of this free country, to set bounds to the philanthropy, to cramp the charity, to fetter the public spirit, to contract the enterprise, to damp the independent self-reliance of its people. The discovery of this Behooving Machine was the discovery of the political perpetual motion. It never wore out, though it was always going round and round in all the State Departments.

And there, with his noble friend and relative Lord Decimus, was William Barnacle, who had made the ever-famous coalition with Tudor Stilt-stalking, and who always kept ready his own particular recipe for How not to do it; sometimes tapping the Speaker, and drawing it fresh out of him, with a "First, I will beg you, sir, to inform the House what Precedent we have for the course into which the honorable gentleman would precipi-

tate us;" sometimes asking the honorable gentleman to favor him with his own version of the Precedent; sometimes telling the honorable gentleman that he (William Barnacle) would search for a Precedent; and oftentimes crushing the honorable gentleman flat on the spot by telling him there was no Precedent. But, Precedent and Precipitate were, under all circumstances, the well-matched pair of battle-horses of this able Circumlocutionist. No matter that the unhappy honorable gentleman had been trying in vain, for twenty-five years, to precipitate William Barnacle into this — William Barnacle still put it to the House, and (at second-hand or so) to the country, whether he was to be precipitated into this. No matter that it was utterly irreconcilable with the nature of things and course of events that the wretched honorable gentleman could possibly produce a Precedent for this — William Barnacle would nevertheless thank the honorable gentleman for that ironical cheer, and would close with him upon that issue, and would tell him to his teeth that there was no Precedent for this. It might, perhaps, have been objected that the William Barnacle wisdom was not high wisdom, or the earth it bamboozled would never have been made, or, if made in a rash mistake, would have remained blank mad. But, Precedent and Precipitate together frightened all objection out of most people.

And there, too, was another Barnacle, a lively one, who had leaped through twenty places in quick succession, and was always in two or three at once, and who was the much-respected inventor of an art which he practised with great success and admiration in all Barnacle Governments. This was, when

he was asked a Parliamentary question on any one topic, to return an answer on any other. It had done immense service, and brought him into high esteem with the Circumlocution Office.

And there, too, was a sprinkling of less distinguished Parliamentary Barnacles, who had not as yet got anything snug, and were going through their probation to prove their worthiness. These Barnacles perched upon staircases and hid in passages, waiting their orders to make houses or not to make houses; and they did all their hearing, and ohing, and cheering, and barking, under directions from the heads of the family; and they put dummy motions on the paper in the way of other men's motions, and they stalled disagreeable subjects off until late in the night and late in the session, and then with virtuous patriotism cried out that it was too late; and they went down into the country, whenever they were sent, and swore that Lord Decimus had revived trade from a swoon, and commerce from a fit, and had doubled the harvest of corn, quadrupled the harvest of hay, and prevented no end of gold flying out of the Bank. Also these Barnacles were dealt, by the heads of the family, like so many cards below the court cards, to public meetings and dinners; where they bore testimony to all sorts of services on the part of their noble and honorable relatives, and buttered the Barnacles on all sorts of toasts. And they stood, under similar orders, at all sorts of elections; and they turned out of their own seats, on the shortest notice and the most unreasonable terms, to let in other men; and they fetched and carried, and toadied and jobbed, and corrupted, and ate heaps

of dirt, and were indefatigable in the public service. And there was not a list, in all the Circumlocution Office, of places that might fall vacant anywhere within half a century, from a Lord of the Treasury to a Chinese Consul, and up again to a Governor-General of India, but, as applicants for such places, the names of some or of every one of these hungry and adhesive Barnacles were down.

It was necessarily but a sprinkling of any class of Barnacles that attended the marriage, for there were not twoscore in all, and what is that subtracted from Legion? But, the sprinkling was a swarm in the Twickenham cottage, and filled it. A Barnacle (assisted by a Barnacle) married the happy pair, and it behooved Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle himself to conduct Mrs. Meagles to breakfast.

The entertainment was not as agreeable and natural as it might have been. Mr. Meagles, hove down by his good company while he highly appreciated it, was not himself. Mrs. Gowan was herself, and that did not improve him. The fiction that it was not Mr. Meagles who had stood in the way, but that it was the Family greatness, and that the Family greatness had made a concession, and there was now a soothing unanimity, pervaded the affair, though it was never openly expressed. Then the Barnacles felt that they, for their parts, would have done with the Meagleses when the present patronizing occasion was over; and the Meagleses felt the same for their parts. Then Gowan, asserting his rights as a disappointed man who had his grudge against the family, and who perhaps had allowed his mother to have them there, as much in

the hope that it might give them some annoyance as with any other benevolent object, aired his pencil and his poverty ostentatiously before them, and told them he hoped in time to settle a crust of bread and cheese on his wife, and that he begged such of them as (more fortunate than himself) came in for any good thing, and could buy a picture, to please to remember the poor painter. Then Lord Decimus, who was a wonder on his own Parliamentary pedestal, turned out to be the windiest creature here; proposing happiness to the bride and bridegroom in a series of platitudes that would have made the hair of any sincere disciple and believer stand on end; and trotting, with the complacency of an idiotic elephant, among howling labyrinths of sentences which he seemed to take for high-roads, and never so much as wanted to get out of. Then Mr. Tite Barnacle could not but feel that there was a person in company who would have disturbed his lifelong sitting to Sir Thomas Lawrence in full official character, if such disturbance had been possible: while Barnacle Junior did, with indignation, communicate to two vapid young gentlemen, his relatives, that there was a feller here, look here, who had come to our department without an appointment, and said he wanted to know, you know; and that, look here, if he was to break out now, as he might, you know (for you never could tell what an ungentlemanly Radical of that sort would be up to next), and was to say, look here, that he wanted to know this moment, you know, that would be Jolly; wouldn't it?

The pleasantest part of the occasion by far, to Clennam, was the painfullest. When Mr. and Mrs.

Meagles at last hung about Pet, in the room with the two pictures (where the company were not), before going with her to the threshold which she could never recross to be the old Pet and the old delight, nothing could be more natural and simple than the three were. Gowan himself was touched, and answered Mr. Meagles's "Oh, Gowan, take care of her, take care of her!" with an earnest "Don't be so broken-hearted, sir. By Heaven, I will!"

And so, with last sobs and last loving words, and a last look to Clennam of confidence in his promise, Pet fell back in the carriage, and her husband waved his hand, and they were away for Dover. Though not until the faithful Mrs. Tickit, in her silk gown and jet-black curls, had rushed out from some hiding-place, and thrown both her shoes after the carriage; an apparition which occasioned great surprise to the distinguished company at the windows.

The said company being now relieved from further attendance, and the chief Barnacles being rather hurried (for they had it in hand just then to send a mail or two, which was in danger of going straight to its destination, beating about the seas like the Flying Dutchman, and to arrange with complexity for the stoppage of a good deal of important business otherwise in peril of being done), went their several ways; with all affability conveying to Mr. and Mrs. Meagles that general assurance that what they had been doing there, they had been doing at a sacrifice for Mr. and Mrs. Meagles's good, which they always conveyed to Mr. John Bull in their official condescension to that most unfortunate creature.

A miserable blank remained in the house, and in the hearts of the father and mother and Clennam. Mr. Meagles called only one remembrance to his aid that really did him good.

"It's very gratifying, Arthur," he said, "after all, to look back upon."

"The past?" said Clennam.

"Yes — but I mean the company."

It had made him much more low and unhappy at the time, but now it really did him good. "It's very gratifying," he said, often repeating the remark in the course of the evening. "Such high company!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHAT WAS BEHIND MR. PANCKS ON LITTLE DORRIT'S HAND.

It was at this time that Mr. Pancks, in discharge of his compact with Clennam, revealed to him the whole of his gypsy story, and told him Little Dorrit's fortune. Her father was heir-at-law to a great estate that had long lain unknown of, unclaimed, and accumulating. His right was now clear, nothing interposed in his way, the Marshalsea gates stood open, the Marshalsea walls were down, a few flourishes of his pen, and he was extremely rich.

In his tracking out of the claim to its complete establishment Mr. Pancks had shown a sagacity that nothing could baffle, and a patience and secrecy that nothing could tire. "I little thought, sir," said Pancks, "when you and I crossed Smithfield that night, and I told you what sort of a Collector I was, that this would come of it. I little thought, sir, when I told you you were not of the Clennams of Cornwall, that I was ever going to tell you who *were* of the Dorrits of Dorsetshire." He then went on to detail How, having that name recorded in his notebook, he was first attracted by the name alone. How, having often found two exactly similar names,

even belonging to the same place, to involve no traceable consanguinity, near or distant, he did not at first give much heed to this; except in the way of speculation as to what a surprising change would be made in the condition of a little seamstress, if she could be shown to have any interest in so large a property. How he rather supposed himself to have pursued the idea into its next degree, because there was something uncommon in the quiet little seamstress, which pleased him and provoked his curiosity. How he had felt his way inch by inch, and "Moled it out, sir" (that was Mr. Pancks's expression), grain by grain. How, in the beginning of the labor described by this new verb, and to render which the more expressive Mr. Pancks shut his eyes in pronouncing it, and shook his hair over them, he had alternated from sudden lights and hopes to sudden darkness and no hopes, and back again, and back again. How he had made acquaintances in the prison expressly that he might come and go there as all other comers and goers did; and how his first ray of light was unconsciously given him by Mr. Dorrit himself, and by his son: to both of whom he easily became known; with both of whom he talked much casually ("but always Moleing, you'll observe," said Mr. Pancks); and from whom he derived, without being at all suspected, two or three little points of family history which, as he began to hold clews of his own, suggested others. How it had at length become plain to Mr. Pancks that he had made a real discovery of the heir-at-law to a great fortune, and that his discovery had but to be ripened to legal fulness and perfection. How he had, thereupon, sworn his landlord,

Mr. Rugg, to secrecy in a solemn manner, and taken him into Moleing partnership. How they had employed John Chivery as their sole clerk and agent, seeing to whom he was devoted. And how, until the present hour, when authorities mighty in the Bank and learned in the law declared their successful labors ended, they had confided in no other human being.

"So, if the whole thing had broken down, sir," concluded Pancks, "at the very last, say the day before the other day when I showed you our papers in the prison yard, or say that very day, nobody but ourselves would have been cruelly disappointed, or a penny the worse."

Clennam, who had been almost incessantly shaking hands with him throughout the narrative, was reminded by this to say in an amazement which even the preparation he had had for the main disclosure scarcely smoothed down, "My dear Mr. Pancks, this must have cost you a great sum of money."

"Pretty well, sir," said the triumphant Pancks. "No trifle, though we did it as cheap as it could be done. And the outlay was a difficulty, let me tell you."

"A difficulty!" repeated Clennam. "But the difficulties you have so wonderfully conquered in the whole business!" shaking his hand again.

"I'll tell you how I did it," said the delighted Pancks, putting his hair into a condition as elevated as himself. "First, I spent all I had of my own. That wasn't much."

"I am sorry for it," said Clennam; "not that it matters now, though. Then, what did you do?"

"Then," answered Pancks, "I borrowed a sum of my proprietor."

"Of Mr. Casby?" said Clennam. "He's a fine old fellow."

"Noble old boy, ain't he?" said Mr. Pancks, entering on a series of the dryest of snorts. "Generous old buck. Confiding old boy. Philanthropic old buck. Benevolent old boy! Twenty per cent I engaged to pay him, sir. But we never do business for less at our shop."

Arthur felt an awkward consciousness of having, in his exultant condition, been a little premature.

"I said to that — boiling-over old Christian," Mr. Pancks pursued, appearing greatly to relish this descriptive epithet, "that I had got a little project on hand; a hopeful one; I told him a hopeful one; which wanted a certain small capital. I proposed to him to lend me the money on my note. Which he did at twenty: sticking the twenty on in a business-like way, and putting it into the note, to look like a part of the principal. If I had broken down after that, I should have been his grubber for the next seven years at half wages and double grind. But he's a perfect Patriarch; and it would do a man good to serve him on such terms — on any terms."

Arthur for his life could not have said with confidence whether Pancks really thought so or not.

"When that was gone, sir," resumed Pancks, "and it did go, though I dribbled it out like so much blood, I had taken Mr. Rugg into the secret. I proposed to borrow of Mr. Rugg (or of Miss Rugg; it's the same thing; she made a little money by a speculation in the Common Pleas once). He lent it

at ten, and thought that pretty high. But Mr. Rugg's a red-haired man, sir, and gets his hair cut. And as to the crown of his hat, it's high. And as to the brim of his hat, it's narrow. And there's no more benevolence bubbling out of *him* than out of a ninepin."

"Your own recompense for all this, Mr. Pancks," said Clennam, "ought to be a large one."

"I don't mistrust getting it, sir," said Pancks. "I have made no bargain. I owed you one on that score; now I have paid it. Money out of pocket made good, time fairly allowed for, and Mr. Rugg's bill settled, a thousand pounds would be a fortune to me. That matter I place in your hands. I authorize you, now, to break all this to the family in any way you think best. Miss Amy Dorrit will be with Mrs. Finching this morning. The sooner done the better. Can't be done too soon."

This conversation took place in Clennam's bedroom, while he was yet in bed. For Mr. Pancks had knocked up the house, and made his way in, very early in the morning; and, without once sitting down or standing still, had delivered himself of the whole of his details (illustrated with a variety of documents) at the bedside. He now said he would "go and look up Mr. Rugg," from whom his excited state of mind appeared to require another back; and bundling up his papers, and exchanging one more hearty shake of the hand with Clennam, he went at full speed down-stairs, and steamed off.

Clennam, of course, resolved to go direct to Mr. Casby's. He dressed and got out so quickly, that he found himself at the corner of the patriarchal street nearly an hour before her time; but he was

not sorry to have the opportunity of calming himself with a leisurely walk.

When he returned to the street, and had knocked at the bright brass knocker, he was informed that she had come, and was shown up-stairs to Flora's breakfast-room. Little Dorrit was not there herself, but Flora was, and testified the greatest amazement at seeing him.

"Good gracious, Arthur — Doyce and Clennam!" cried that lady, "who would have ever thought of seeing such a sight as this and pray excuse a wrapper for upon my word I really never and a faded check too which is worse but our little friend is making me a, not that I need mind mentioning it to you for you must know that there are such things a skirt, and having arranged that a trying on should take place after breakfast is the reason though I wish not so badly starched."

"I ought to make an apology," said Arthur, "for so early and abrupt a visit; but you will excuse it when I tell you the cause."

"In times forever fled Arthur," returned Mrs. Finching, "pray excuse me Doyce and Clennam infinitely more correct and though unquestionably distant still 'tis distance lends enchantment to the view, at least I don't mean that and if I did I suppose it would depend considerably on the nature of the view, but I'm running on again and you put it all out of my head."

She glanced at him tenderly, and resumed: —

"In times forever fled I was going to say it would have sounded strange indeed for Arthur Clennam — Doyce and Clennam naturally quite different — to make apologies for coming here at any

time, but that is past and what is past can never be recalled except in his own case as poor Mr. F. said when he was in spirits Cucumber and therefore never ate it."

She was making the tea when Arthur came in, and now hastily finished that operation.

"Papa," she said, all mystery and whisper, as she shut down the teapot lid, "is sitting prosingly breaking his new-laid egg in the back-parlor over the City article exactly like the Woodpecker Tapping and need never know that you are here, and, our little friend you are well aware may be fully trusted when she comes down from cutting out on the large table overhead."

Arthur then told her, in the fewest words, that it was their little friend he came to see; and what he had to announce to their little friend. At which astounding intelligence Flora clasped her hands, fell into a tremble, and shed tears of sympathy and pleasure, like the good-natured creature she really was.

"For gracious sake let me get out of the way first," said Flora, putting her hands to her ears, and moving towards the door, "or I know I shall go off dead and screaming and make everybody worse, and the dear little thing only this morning looking so nice and neat and good and yet so poor and now a fortune is she really and deserves it too! and might I mention it to Mr. F.'s Aunt Arthur not Doyce and Clennam for this once or if objectionable not on any account."

Arthur nodded his free permission, since Flora shut out all verbal communication. Flora nodded in return to thank him, and hurried out of the room.

Little Dorrit's step was already on the stairs, and in another moment she was at the door. Do what he would to compose his face, he could not convey so much of an ordinary expression into it, but that the moment she saw it she dropped her work, and cried, "Mr. Clennam! What's the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing. That is, no misfortune has happened. I have come to tell you something, but it is a piece of great good fortune."

"Good fortune?"

"Wonderful fortune!"

They stood in a window, and her eyes full of light, were fixed upon his face. He put an arm about her, seeing her likely to sink down. She put a hand upon that arm, partly to rest upon it, and partly so to preserve their relative positions as that her intent look at him should be shaken by no change of attitude in either of them. Her lips seemed to repeat "Wonderful fortune?" He repeated it again aloud.

"Dear Little Dorrit! Your father."

The ice of the pale face broke at the word, and little lights and shoots of expression passed all over it. They were all expressions of pain. Her breath was faint and hurried. Her heart beat fast. He would have clasped the little figure closer, but he saw that the eyes appealed to him not to be moved.

"Your father can be free within this week. He does not know it; we must go to him from here, to tell him of it. Your father will be free within a few days. Your father will be free within a few hours. Remember we must go to him from here, to tell him of it!"

That brought her back. Her eyes were closing, but they opened again.

"This is not all the good fortune. This is not all the wonderful good fortune, my dear Little Dorrit. Shall I tell you more?"

Her lips shaped "Yes."

"Your father will be no beggar when he is free. He will want for nothing. Shall I tell you more? Remember! He knows nothing of it; we must go to him from here, to tell him of it."

She seemed to entreat him for a little time. He held her in his arm, and, after a pause, bent down his ear to listen.

"Did you ask me to go on?"

"Yes."

"He will be a rich man. He is a rich man. A great sum of money is waiting to be paid over to him as his inheritance; you are all henceforth very wealthy. Bravest and best of children, I thank Heaven that you are rewarded!"

As he kissed her, she turned her head towards his shoulder, and raised her arm towards his neck; cried out "Father! Father! Father!" and swooned away.

Upon which Flora returned to take care of her, and hovered about her on a sofa, intermingling kind offices and incoherent scraps of conversation in a manner so confounding, that whether she pressed the Marshalsea to take a spoonful of unclaimed dividends, for it would do her good; or whether she congratulated Little Dorrit's father on coming into possession of a hundred thousand smelling-bottles; or whether she explained that she put seventy-five thousand drops of spirits of lavender

on fifty thousand pounds of lump sugar, and that she entreated Little Dorrit to take that gentle restorative; or whether she bathed the foreheads of Doyce and Clennam in vinegar, and gave the late Mr. F. more air; no one with any sense of responsibility could have undertaken to decide. A tributary stream of confusion, moreover, poured in from an adjoining bedroom, where Mr. F.'s Aunt appeared, from the sound of her voice, to be in a horizontal posture, awaiting her breakfast; and from which bower that inexorable lady snapped off short taunts, whenever she could get a hearing, as, "Don't believe it's his doing!" and "He needn't take no credit to himself for it!" and "It'll be long enough, I expect, afore he'll give up any of his own money!" all designed to disparage Clennam's share in the discovery, and to relieve those inveterate feelings with which Mr. F.'s Aunt regarded him.

But Little Dorrit's solicitude to get to her father, and to carry the joyful tidings to him, and not to leave him in his jail a moment with this happiness in store for him and still unknown to him, did more for her speedy restoration than all the skill and attention on earth could have done. "Come with me to my dear father. Pray come and tell my dear father!" were the first words she said. Her father, her father. She spoke of nothing but him, thought of nothing but him. Kneeling down and pouring out her thankfulness with uplifted hands, her thanks were for her father.

Flora's tenderness was quite overcome by this, and she launched out among the cups and saucers into a wonderful flow of tears and speech.

"I declare," she sobbed, "I never was so cut up

since your mamma and my papa not Doyce and Clennam for this once but give the precious little thing a cup of tea and make her put it to her lips at least pray Arthur do, not even Mr. F.'s last illness for that was of another kind and gout is not a child's affection though very painful for all parties, and Mr. F. a martyr with his leg upon a rest and the wine trade in itself inflammatory for they will do it more or less among themselves and who can wonder, it seems like a dream I am sure to think of nothing at all this morning and now Mines of money is it really, but you must you know my darling love because you never will be strong enough to tell him all about it upon tea-spoons, mightn't it be even best to try the directions of my own medical man for though the flavor is anything but agreeable still I force myself to do it as a prescription and find the benefit, you'd rather not why no my dear I'd rather not but still I do it as a duty, everybody will congratulate you some in earnest and some not and many will congratulate you with all their hearts but none more so I do assure you than from the bottom of my own I do myself though sensible of blundering and being stupid, and will be judged by Arthur not Doyce and Clennam for this once so good-by darling and God bless you and may you be very happy and excuse the liberty, vowing that the dress shall never be finished by anybody else but shall be laid by for a keepsake just as it is and called Little Dorrit though why that strangest of denominations at any time I never did myself and now I never shall!"

Thus Flora, in taking leave of her favorite. Little Dorrit thanked her, and embraced her, over

and over again; and finally came out of the house with Clennam, and took coach for the Marshalsea.

It was a strangely unreal ride through the old squalid streets, with a sensation of being raised out of them into an airy world of wealth and grandeur. When Arthur told her that she would soon ride in her own carriage through very different scenes, when all the familiar experiences would have vanished away, she looked frightened. But, when he substituted her father for herself, and told her how he would ride in his carriage, and how great and grand he would be, her tears of joy and innocent pride fell fast. Seeing that the happiness her mind could realize was all shining upon him, Arthur kept that single figure before her; and so they rode brightly through the poor streets in the prison neighborhood, to carry him the great news.

When Mr. Chivery, who was on duty, admitted them into the lodge, he saw something in their faces which filled him with astonishment. He stood looking after them, when they hurried into the prison, as though he perceived that they had come back accompanied by a ghost apiece. Two or three collegians whom they passed looked after them too, and presently joining Mr. Chivery, formed a little group on the lodge steps, in the midst of which there spontaneously originated a whisper that the Father was going to get his discharge. Within a few minutes it was heard in the remotest room in the college.

Little Dorrit opened the door from without, and they both entered. He was sitting in his old gray gown, and his old black cap, in the sunlight by the window, reading his newspaper. His glasses were

in his hand, and he had just looked round; surprised at first, no doubt, by her step upon the stairs, not expecting her until night; surprised again by seeing Arthur Clennam in her company. As they came in, the same unwonted look in both of them, which had already caught attention in the yard below, struck him. He did not rise or speak, but laid down his glasses and his newspaper on the table beside him, and looked at them with his mouth a little open, and his lips trembling. When Arthur put out his hand, he touched it, but not with his usual state; and then he turned to his daughter, who had sat down close beside him with her hands upon his shoulder, and looked attentively in her face.

"Father! I have been made so happy this morning!"

"You have been made so happy, my dear?"

"By Mr. Clennam, father. He brought me such joyful and wonderful intelligence about you! If he had not, with his great kindness and gentleness, prepared me for it, father — prepared me for it, father — I think I could not have borne it."

Her agitation was exceedingly great, and the tears rolled down her face. He put his hand suddenly to his heart, and looked at Clennam.

"Compose yourself, sir," said Clennam, "and take a little time to think. To think of the brightest and most fortunate accidents of life. We have all heard of great surprises of joy. They are not at an end, sir. They are rare, but not at an end."

"Mr. Clennam? Not at an end? Not at an end for" — He touched himself upon the breast, instead of saying "me."

"No," returned Clennam.

"What surprise," he asked, keeping his left hand over his heart, and there stopping in his speech, while with his right hand he put his glasses exactly level on the table: "what such surprise can be in store for me?"

"Let me answer with another question. Tell me, Mr. Dorrit, what surprise would be the most unlooked for and the most acceptable to you. Do not be afraid to imagine it, or to say what it would be."

He looked steadfastly at Clennam, and, so looking at him, seemed to change into a very old, haggard man. The sun was bright upon the wall beyond the window, and on the spikes at top. He slowly stretched out the hand that had been upon his heart, and pointed at the wall.

"It is down," said Clennam. "Gone!"

He remained in the same attitude, looking steadfastly at him.

"And in its place," said Clennam, slowly and distinctly, "are the means to possess and enjoy the utmost that they have so long shut out. Mr. Dorrit, there is not the smallest doubt that within a few days you will be free, and highly prosperous. I congratulate you with all my soul on this change of fortune, and on the happy future into which you are soon to carry the treasure you have been blessed with here — the best of all the riches you can have elsewhere — the treasure at your side."

With those words, he pressed his hand and released it; and his daughter, laying her face against his, encircled him in the hour of his prosperity with her arms, as she had in the long years of his adversity encircled him with her love and toil and truth;

and poured out her full heart in gratitude, hope, joy, blissful ecstasy, and all for him.

"I shall see him as I never saw him yet. I shall see my dear love with the dark cloud cleared away. I shall see him as my poor mother saw him long ago. Oh, my dear, my dear! Oh, father, father! Oh, thank God, thank God!"

He yielded himself to her kisses and caresses, but did not return them, except that he put an arm about her. Neither did he say one word. His steadfast look was now divided between her and Clennam, and he began to shake as if he were very cold. Explaining to Little Dorrit that he would run to the coffee-house for a bottle of wine, Arthur fetched it with all the haste he could use. While it was being brought from the cellar to the bar, a number of excited people asked him what had happened; when he hurriedly informed them that Mr. Dorrit had succeeded to a fortune.

On coming back with the wine in his hand, he found that she had placed her father in his easy-chair, and had loosened his shirt and neckcloth. They filled a tumbler with wine, and held it to his lips. When he had swallowed a little, he took the glass himself, and emptied it. Soon after that he leaned back in his chair and cried, with his handkerchief before his face.

After this had lasted a while, Clennam thought it a good season for diverting his attention from the main surprise by relating its details. Slowly, therefore, and in a quiet tone of voice, he explained them as he best could, and enlarged on the nature of Pancks's service.

"He shall be — ha — he shall be handsomely

recompensed, sir," said the Father, starting up and moving hurriedly about the room. "Assure yourself, Mr. Clennam, that everybody concerned shall be — ha — shall be nobly rewarded. No one, my dear sir, shall say that he has an unsatisfied claim against me. I shall repay the — hum — the advances I have had from you, sir, with peculiar pleasure. I beg to be informed, at your early convenience, what advances you have made my son."

He had no purpose in going about the room, but he was not still a moment.

"Everybody," he said, "shall be remembered. I will not go away from here in anybody's debt. All the people who have been — ha — well behaved towards myself and my family shall be rewarded. Chivery shall be rewarded. Young John shall be rewarded. I particularly wish, and intend, to act munificently, Mr. Clennam."

"Will you allow me," said Arthur, laying his purse on the table, "to supply any present contingencies, Mr. Dorrit? I thought it best to bring a sum of money for the purpose."

"Thank you, sir, thank you. I accept with readiness, at the present moment, what I could not an hour ago have conscientiously taken. I am obliged to you for the temporary accommodation. Exceedingly temporary, but well timed — well timed." His hand had closed upon the money, and he carried it about with him. "Be so kind, sir, as to add the amount to those former advances to which I have already referred; being careful, if you please, not to omit advances made to my son. A mere verbal statement of the gross amount is all I shall — ha — all I shall require."

His eye fell upon his daughter at this point, and he stopped for a moment to kiss her, and to pat her head.

"It will be necessary to find a milliner, my love, and to make a speedy and complete change in your very plain dress. Something must be done with Maggy too, who at present is — ha — barely respectable, barely respectable. And your sister, Amy, and your brother. And *my* brother, your uncle — poor soul, I trust this will rouse him — messengers must be despatched to fetch them. They must be informed of this. We must break it to them cautiously, but they must be informed directly. We owe it as a duty to them, and to ourselves, from this moment, not to let them — hum — not to let them do anything."

This was the first intimation he had ever given that he was privy to the fact that they did something for a livelihood.

He was still jogging about the room, with the purse clutched in his hand, when a great cheering arose in the yard. "The news has spread already," said Clennam, looking down from the window. "Will you show yourself to them, Mr. Dorrit? They are very earnest, and they evidently wish it."

"I — hum — ha — I confess I could have desired, Amy, my dear," he said, jogging about in a more feverish flutter than before, "to have made some change in my dress first, and to have bought a — hum — a watch and chain. But if it must be done as it is, it — ha — it must be done. Fasten the collar of my shirt, my dear. Mr. Clennam, would you oblige me — hum — with a blue neckcloth you will find in that drawer at your elbow? Button my

coat across at the chest, my love. It looks — ha — it looks broader, buttoned."

With his trembling hand he pushed his gray hair up, and then, taking Clennam and his daughter for supporters, appeared at the window leaning on an arm of each. The collegians cheered him very heartily, and he kissed his hand to them with great urbanity and protection. When he withdrew into the room again, he said "Poor creatures!" in a tone of much pity for their miserable condition.

Little Dorrit was deeply anxious that he should lie down to compose himself. On Arthur's speaking to her of his going to inform Pancks that he might now appear as soon as he would, and pursue the joyful business to its close, she entreated him in a whisper to stay with her until her father should be quite calm and at rest. He needed no second entreaty; and she prepared her father's bed, and begged him to lie down. For another half-hour or more he would be persuaded to do nothing but go about the room, discussing with himself the probabilities for and against the Marshal's allowing the whole of the prisoners to go to the windows of the official residence which commanded the street, to see himself and family depart forever in a carriage — which, he said, he thought would be a Sight for them. But, gradually, he began to droop and tire, and at last stretched himself upon the bed.

She took her faithful place beside him, fanning him and cooling his forehead; and he seemed to be falling asleep (always with the money in his hand), when he unexpectedly sat up and said, —

"Mr. Clennam, I beg your pardon. Am I to understand, my dear sir, that I could — ha — could

pass through the lodge at this moment, and — hum — take a walk?"

"I think not, Mr. Dorrit," was the unwilling reply. "There are certain forms to be completed; and although your detention here is now in itself a form, I fear it is one that for a little longer has to be observed too."

At this he shed tears again.

"It is but a few hours, sir," Clennam cheerfully urged upon him.

"A few hours, sir!" he returned in a sudden passion. "You talk very easily of hours, sir! How long do you suppose, sir, that an hour is to a man who is choking for want of air?"

It was his last demonstration for that time; as, after shedding some more tears and querulously complaining that he couldn't breathe, he slowly fell into a slumber. Clennam had abundant occupation for his thoughts, as he sat in the quiet room watching the father on his bed, and the daughter fanning his face.

Little Dorrit had been thinking too. After softly putting his gray hair aside, and touching his forehead with her lips, she looked towards Arthur, who came nearer to her, and pursued in a low whisper the subject of her thoughts.

"Mr. Clennam, will he pay all his debts before he leaves here?"

"No doubt. All."

"All the debts for which he has been imprisoned here all my life and longer?"

"No doubt."

There was something of uncertainty and remonstrance in her look; something that was not all

satisfaction. He wondered to detect it, and said,— "You are glad he should do so?"

"Are you?" asked Little Dorrit wistfully.

"Am I? Most heartily glad!"

"Then I know I ought to be."

"And are you not?"

"It seems to me hard," said Little Dorrit, "that he should have lost so many years and suffered so much, and at last pay all the debts as well. It seems to me hard that he should pay in life and money both."

"My dear child"—Clennam was beginning.

"Yes, I know I am wrong," she pleaded timidly; "don't think any worse of me; it has grown up with me here."

The prison, which could spoil so many things, had tainted Little Dorrit's mind no more than this. Engendered as the confusion was in compassion for the poor prisoner, her father, it was the first speck Clennam had ever seen, it was the last speck Clennam ever saw, of the prison atmosphere upon her.

He thought this, and forbore to say another word. With the thought, her purity and goodness came before him in their brightest light. The little spot made them the more beautiful.

Worn out with her own emotions, and yielding to the silence of the room, her hand slowly slackened and failed in its fanning movement, and her head dropped down on the pillow at her father's side. Clennam rose softly, opened and closed the door without a sound, and passed from the prison, carrying the quiet with him into the turbulent streets.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE MARSHALSEA BECOMES AN ORPHAN.

And now the day arrived when Mr. Dorrit and his family were to leave the prison forever, and the stones of its much-trodden pavement were to know them no more.

The interval had been short, but he had greatly complained of its length, and had been imperious with Mr. Rugg touching the delay. He had been high with Mr. Rugg, and had threatened to employ some one else. He had requested Mr. Rugg not to presume upon the place in which he found him, but to do his duty, sir, and to do it with promptitude. He had told Mr. Rugg that he knew what lawyers and agents were, and that he would not submit to imposition. On that gentleman's humbly representing that he exerted himself to the utmost, Miss Fanny was very short with him; desiring to know what less he could do, when he had been told a dozen times that money was no object, and expressing her suspicion that he forgot whom he talked to.

Towards the Marshal, who was a Marshal of many years' standing, and with whom he had never had any previous difference, Mr. Dorrit comported himself with severity. That officer, on personally ten-

dering his congratulations, offered the free use of two rooms in his house for Mr. Dorrit's occupation until his departure. Mr. Dorrit thanked him at the moment, and replied that he would think of it; but the Marshal was no sooner gone than he sat down and wrote him a cutting note, in which he remarked that he had never on any former occasion had the honor of receiving his congratulations (which was true, though indeed there had not been anything particular to congratulate him upon), and that he begged, on behalf of himself and family, to repudiate the Marshal's offer, with all those thanks which its disinterested character and its perfect independence of all worldly considerations demanded.

Although his brother showed so dim a glimmering of interest in their altered fortunes that it was very doubtful whether he understood them, Mr. Dorrit caused him to be measured for new raiment by the hosiers, tailors, hatters, and bootmakers whom he called in for himself; and ordered that his old clothes should be taken from him and burned. Miss Fanny and Mr. Tip required no direction in making an appearance of great fashion and elegance; and the three passed this interval together at the best hotel in the neighborhood — though truly, as Miss Fanny said, the best was very indifferent. In connection with that establishment, Mr. Tip hired a cabriolet, horse, and groom, a very neat turn-out, which was usually to be observed, for two or three hours at a time, gracing the Borough High Street, outside the Marshalsea courtyard. A modest little hired chariot and pair was also frequently to be seen there; in alighting from and entering which vehicle Miss Fanny fluttered the Marshal's daughters by the display of inaccessible bonnets.

A great deal of business was transacted in this short period. Among other items, Messrs. Peddle and Pool, solicitors, of Monument Yard, were instructed by their client Edward Dorrit, Esquire, to address a letter to Mr. Arthur Clennam, enclosing the sum of twenty-four pounds nine shillings and eightpence, being the amount of principal and interest computed at the rate of five per cent per annum, in which their client believed himself to be indebted to Mr. Clennam. In making this communication and remittance, Messrs. Peddle and Pool were further instructed by their client to remind Mr. Clennam that the favor of the advance now repaid (including gate-fees) had not been asked of him, and to inform him that it would not have been accepted if it had been openly proffered in his name. With which they requested a stamped receipt, and remained his obedient servants. A great deal of business had likewise to be done, within the so-soon-to-be-orphaned Marshalsea, by Mr. Dorrit so long its Father, chiefly arising out of applications made to him by collegians for small sums of money. To these he responded with the greatest liberality, and with no lack of formality; always first writing to appoint a time at which the applicant might wait upon him in his room, and then receiving him in the midst of a vast accumulation of documents, and accompanying his donation (for he said in every such case, "It is a donation, not a loan") with a great deal of good counsel: to the effect that he, the expiring Father of the Marshalsea, hoped to be long remembered as an example that a man might preserve his own and the general respect even there.

The collegians were not envious. Besides that

they had a personal and traditional regard for a collegian of so many years' standing, the event was creditable to the college, and made it famous in the newspapers. Perhaps more of them thought, too, than were quite aware of it, that the thing might in the lottery of chances have happened to themselves, or that something of the sort might yet happen to themselves, some day or other. They took it very well. A few were low at the thought of being left behind, and being left poor; but even these did not grudge the family their brilliant reverse. There might have been much more envy in politer places. It seems probable that mediocrity of fortune would have been disposed to be less magnanimous than the collegians, who lived from hand to mouth — from the pawnbroker's hand to the day's dinner.

They got up an address to him, which they presented in a neat frame and glass (though it was not afterwards displayed in the family mansion, or preserved among the family papers); and to which he returned a gracious answer. In that document he assured them, in a Royal manner, that he received the profession of their attachment with a full conviction of its sincerity; and again generally exhorted them to follow his example — which, at least in so far as coming into a great property was concerned, there is no doubt they would have gladly imitated. He took the same occasion of inviting them to a comprehensive entertainment, to be given to the whole college in the yard, and at which he signified he would have the honor of taking a parting glass to the health and happiness of all those whom he was about to leave behind.

He did not in person dine at this public repast (it took place at two in the afternoon, and his dinners now came in from the hotel at six), but his son was so good as to take the head of the principal table, and to be very free and engaging. He himself went about among the company, and took notice of individuals, and saw that the viands were of the quality he had ordered, and that all were served. On the whole, he was like a baron of the olden time, in a rare good humor. At the conclusion of the repast he pledged his guests in a bumper of old madeira; and told them that he hoped they had enjoyed themselves, and, what was more, that they would enjoy themselves for the rest of the evening; that he wished them well; and that he bade them welcome. His health being drunk with acclamations, he was not so baronial after all but that, in trying to return thanks, he broke down in the manner of a mere serf with a heart in his breast, and wept before them all. After this great success, which he supposed to be a failure, he gave them "Mr. Chivery and his brother officers;" whom he had beforehand presented with ten pounds each, and who were all in attendance. Mr. Chivery spoke to the toast, saying, What you undertake to lock up, lock up; but remember that you are, in the words of the fettered African, a man and a brother ever. The list of toasts disposed of, Mr. Dorrit urbanely went through the motions of playing a game at skittles with the collegian who was the next oldest inhabitant to himself; and left the tenantry to their diversions.

But, all these occurrences preceded the final day. And now the day arrived when he and his family were to leave the prison forever, and when the

stones of its much-trodden pavement were to know them no more.

Noon was the hour appointed for the departure. As it approached there was not a collegian within doors, nor a turnkey absent. The latter class of gentlemen appeared in their Sunday clothes, and the greater part of the collegians were brightened up as much as circumstances allowed. Two or three flags were even displayed, and the children put on odds and ends of ribbon. Mr. Dorrit himself, at this trying time, preserved a serious but graceful dignity. Much of his attention was given to his brother, as to whose bearing on the great occasion he felt anxious.

"My dear Frederick," said he, "if you will give me your arm, we will pass among our friends together. I think it is right that we should go out arm-in-arm, my dear Frederick."

"Hah!" said Frederick. "Yes, yes, yes, yes."

"And if, my dear Frederick — if you could, without putting any great constraint upon yourself, throw a little (pray excuse me, Frederick), a little polish into your usual demeanor" —

"William, William," said the other, shaking his head, "it's for you to do all that. I don't know how. All forgotten, forgotten!"

"But, my dear fellow," returned William, "for that very reason, if for no other, you must positively try to rouse yourself. What you have forgotten you must now begin to recall, my dear Frederick. Your position" —

"Eh?" said Frederick.

"Your position, my dear Frederick."

"Mine?" He looked first at his own figure, and

then at his brother's, and then, drawing a long breath, cried, "Hah, to be sure! Yes, yes, yes."

"Your position, my dear Frederick, is now a fine one. Your position as my brother is a very fine one. And I know that it belongs to your conscientious nature to try to become worthy of it, my dear Frederick, and try to adorn it. To be no discredit to it, but adorn it."

"William," said the other weakly, and with a sigh, "I will do anything you wish, my brother, provided it lies in my power. Pray be so kind as to recollect what a limited power mine is. What would you wish me to do to-day, brother? Say what it is, only say what it is."

"My dearest Frederick, nothing. It is not worth troubling so good a heart as yours with."

"Pray trouble it," returned the other. "It finds it no trouble, William, to do anything it can for you."

William passed his hand across his eyes, and murmured with august satisfaction, "Blessings on your attachment, my poor dear fellow!" Then he said aloud, "Well, my dear Frederick, if you will only try, as we walk out, to show that you are alive to the occasion — that you think about it" —

"What would you advise me to think about it?" returned his submissive brother.

"Oh! my dear Frederick, how can I answer you? I can only say what, in leaving these good people, I think myself."

"That's it!" cried his brother. "That will help me."

"I find that I think, my dear Frederick, and with mixed emotions in which a softened compassion predominates, What will they do without me?"

"True," returned his brother. "Yes, yes, yes, yes. I'll think that as we go. What will they do without my brother? Poor things! What will they do without him?"

Twelve o'clock having just struck, and the carriage being reported ready in the outer courtyard, the brothers proceeded down-stairs arm-in-arm. Edward Dorrit, Esquire (once Tip), and his sister Fanny followed, also arm-in-arm; Mr. Plornish and Maggy, to whom had been intrusted the removal of such of the family effects as were considered worth removing, followed, bearing bundles and burdens to be packed in a cart.

In the yard, were the collegians and turnkeys. In the yard, were Mr. Pancks and Mr. Rugg, come to see the last touch given to their work. In the yard, was Young John making a new epitaph for himself, on the occasion of his dying of a broken heart. In the yard, was the Patriarchal Casby, looking so tremendously benevolent that many enthusiastic collegians grasped him fervently by the hand, and the wives and female relatives of many more collegians kissed his hand, nothing doubting that he had done it all. In the yard, was the usual chorus of people proper to such a place. In the yard, was the man with the shadowy grievance respecting the Fund which the Marshal embezzled, who had got up at five in the morning to complete the copying of a perfectly unintelligible history of that transaction, which he had committed to Mr. Dorrit's care as a document of the last importance, calculated to stun the Government and effect the Marshal's downfall. In the yard, was the insolvent whose utmost energies were always set on getting into debt, who broke into

prison with as much pains as other men have broken out of it, and who was always being cleared and complimented; while the insolvent at his elbow — a mere little, snivelling, striving tradesman, half dead of anxious efforts to keep out of debt — found it a hard matter indeed to get a Commissioner to release him with much reproof and reproach. In the yard, was the man of many children and many burdens, whose failure astonished everybody; in the yard, was the man of no children and large resources, whose failure astonished nobody. There, were the people who were always going out to-morrow, and always putting it off; there, were the people who had come in yesterday, and who were much more jealous and resentful of this freak of fortune than the seasoned birds. There, were some who, in pure meanness of spirit, cringed and bowed before the enriched collegian and his family; there, were others who did so really because their eyes, accustomed to the gloom of their imprisonment and poverty, could not support the light of such bright sunshine. There, were many whose shillings had gone into his pocket to buy him meat and drink; but none who were now obtrusively Hail fellow well met! with him, on the strength of that assistance. It was rather to be remarked of the caged birds, that they were a little shy of the bird about to be so grandly free, and that they had a tendency to withdraw themselves towards the bars, and seem a little fluttered as he passed.

Through these spectators, the little procession, headed by the two brothers, moved slowly to the gate. Mr. Dorrit, yielding to the vast speculation how the poor creatures were to get on without him,

was great, and sad, but not absorbed. He patted children on the head like Sir Roger de Coverley going to church, he spoke to people in the background by their Christian names, he condescended to all present, and seemed for their consolation to walk encircled by the legend in golden characters, "Be comforted, my people! Bear it!"

At last three honest cheers announced that he had passed the gate, and that the Marshalsea was an orphan. Before they had ceased to ring in the echoes of the prison walls, the family had got into their carriage, and the attendant had the steps in his hand.

Then, and not before, "Good Gracious!" cried Miss Fanny all at once, "where's Amy?"

Her father had thought she was with her sister. Her sister had thought she was "somewhere or other." They had all trusted to finding her, as they had always done, quietly in the right place at the right moment. This going away was, perhaps, the very first action of their joint lives that they had got through without her.

A minute might have been consumed in the ascertaining of these points, when Miss Fanny, who, from her seat in the carriage, commanded the long narrow passage leading to the lodge, flushed indignantly.

"Now, I do say, pa," cried she, "that this is disgraceful!"

"What is disgraceful, Fanny?"

"I do say," she repeated, "this is perfectly infamous! Really almost enough, even at such a time as this, to make one wish one was dead! Here is that child Amy in her ugly old shabby dress, which she was so obstinate about, pa, which I over and over

again begged and prayed her to change, and which she over and over again objected to, and promised to change to-day, saying she wished to wear it as long as ever she remained in there with you — which was absolutely romantic nonsense of the lowest kind — here is that child Amy disgracing us, to the last moment and at the last moment, by being carried out in that dress after all. And by that Mr. Clennam too!"

The offence was proved as she delivered the indictment. Clennam appeared at the carriage door, bearing the little insensible figure in his arms.

"She has been forgotten," he said in a tone of pity not free from reproach. "I ran up to her room (which Mr. Chivery showed me), and found the door open, and that she had fainted on the floor, dear child. She appeared to have gone to change her dress, and to have sunk down overpowered. It may have been the cheering, or it may have happened sooner. Take care of this poor cold hand, Miss Dorrit. Don't let it fall."

"Thank you, sir," returned Miss Dorrit, bursting into tears. "I believe I know what to do, if you'll give me leave. Dear Amy, open your eyes, that's a love! Oh, Amy, Amy, I really am so vexed and ashamed! Do rouse yourself, darling! Oh, why are they not driving on? Pray, pa, do drive on!"

The attendant, getting between Clennam and the carriage door, with a sharp "By your leave, sir!" bundled up the steps, and they drove away.

THE END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

BOOK THE SECOND. RICHES.

CHAPTER I.

FELLOW-TRAVELLERS.

In the autumn of the year Darkness and Night were creeping up to the highest ridges of the Alps.

It was vintage-time in the valleys on the Swiss side of the Pass of the Great Saint Bernard, and along the banks of the Lake of Geneva. The air there was charged with the scent of gathered grapes. Baskets, troughs, and tubs of grapes stood in the dim village doorways, stopped the steep and narrow village streets, and had been carrying all day along the roads and lanes. Grapes, spilt and crushed under foot, lay about everywhere. The child carried in a sling by the laden peasant woman toiling home was quieted with picked-up grapes; the idiot sunning his big goitre under the eaves of the wooden châlet by the way to the waterfall sat munching grapes; the breath of the cows and goats was redolent of leaves and stalks of grapes; the company in every little cabaret were eating, drinking, talking grapes. A pity that no ripe touch of this generous abundance could be given to the thin, hard, stony wine which, after all, was made from the grapes!

The air had been warm and transparent through the whole of the bright day. Shining metal spires and church roofs, distant and rarely seen, had sparkled in the view; and the snowy mountain-tops had been so clear that unaccustomed eyes, cancelling the intervening country, and slighting their rugged height for something fabulous, would have measured them as within a few hours' easy reach. Mountain peaks of great celebrity in the valleys, whence no trace of their existence was visible sometimes for months together, had been since morning plain and near in the blue sky. And now, when it was dark below, though they seemed solemnly to recede, like spectres who were going to vanish, as the red dye of the sunset faded out of them and left them coldly white, they were yet distinctly defined in their loneliness above the mists and shadows.

Seen from those solitudes, and from the Pass of the Great Saint Bernard, which was one of them, the ascending Night came up the mountain like a rising water. When it at last rose to the walls of the convent of the Great Saint Bernard, it was as if that weather-beaten structure were another Ark, and floated away upon the shadowy waves.

Darkness, outstripping some visitors on mules, had risen thus to the rough convent walls, when those travellers were yet climbing the mountain. As the heat of the glowing day, when they had stopped to drink at the streams of melted ice and snow, was changed to the searching cold of the frosty rarefied night air at a great height, so the fresh beauty of the lower journey had yielded to barrenness and desolation. A craggy track, up which the mules in single file scrambled and turned

from block to block, as though they were ascending the broken staircase of a gigantic ruin, was their way now. No trees were to be seen, nor any vegetable growth, save a poor brown scrubby moss, freezing in the chinks of rock. Blackened skeleton arms of wood by the wayside pointed upward to the convent, as if the ghosts of former travellers overwhelmed by the snow haunted the scene of their distress. Icicle-hung caves and cellars, built for refuges from sudden storms, were like so many whispers of the perils of the place; never-resting wreaths and mazes of mist wandered about, hunted by a moaning wind; and snow, the besetting danger of the mountain, against which all its defences were taken, drifted sharply down.

The file of mules, jaded by their day's work, turned and wound slowly up the steep ascent; the foremost led by a guide on foot, in his broad-brimmed hat and round jacket, carrying a mountain staff or two upon his shoulder, with whom another guide conversed. There was no speaking among the string of riders. The sharp cold, the fatigue of the journey, and a new sensation of a catching in the breath, partly as if they had just emerged from very clear crisp water, and partly as if they had been sobbing, kept them silent.

At length a light on the summit of the rocky staircase gleamed through the snow and mist. The guides called to the mules, the mules pricked up their drooping heads, the travellers' tongues were loosened, and in a sudden burst of slipping, climbing, jingling, clinking, and talking, they arrived at the convent door.

Other mules had arrived not long before, some

with peasant riders, and some with goods, and had trodden the snow about the door into a pool of mud. Riding saddles and bridles, pack saddles and strings of bells, mules and men, lanterns, torches, sacks, provender, barrels, cheeses, kegs of honey and butter, straw bundles and packages of many shapes, were crowded confusedly together in this thawed quagmire and about the steps. Up here in the clouds, everything was seen through cloud, and seemed dissolving into cloud. The breath of the men was cloud, the breath of the mules was cloud, the lights were encircled by cloud, speakers close at hand were not seen for cloud, though their voices and all other sounds were surprisingly clear. Of the cloudy line of mules hastily tied to rings in the wall, one would bite another, or kick another, and then the whole mist would be disturbed; with men diving into it, and cries of men and beasts coming out of it, and no bystander discerning what was wrong. In the midst of this, the great stable of the convent, occupying the basement story, and entered by the basement door, outside which all the disorder was, poured forth its contribution of cloud, as if the whole rugged edifice were filled with nothing else, and would collapse as soon as it had emptied itself, leaving the snow to fall upon the bare mountain summit.

While all this noise and hurry were rife among the living travellers, there, too, silently assembled in a grated house, half a dozen paces removed, with the same cloud infolding them, and the same snowflakes drifting in upon them, were the dead travellers found upon the mountain. The mother, storm-belated many winters ago, still standing in

the corner with her baby at her breast; the man who had frozen with his arm raised to his mouth in fear or hunger, still pressing it with his dry lips after years and years. An awful company, mysteriously come together! A wild destiny for that mother to have foreseen: "Surrounded by so many and such companions, upon whom I never looked, and never shall look, I and my child will dwell together inseparable on the Great Saint Bernard, outlasting generations who will come to see us, and will never know our name, or one word of our story but the end."

The living travellers thought little or nothing of the dead just then. They thought much more of alighting at the convent door, and warming themselves at the convent fire. Disengaged from the turmoil, which was already calming down as the crowd of mules began to be bestowed in the stable, they hurried shivering up the steps and into the building. There was a smell within, coming up from the floor of tethered beasts, like the smell of a menagerie of wild animals. There were strong arched galleries within, huge stone piers, great staircases, and thick walls pierced with small sunken windows — fortifications against the mountain storms, as if they had been human enemies. There were gloomy vaulted sleeping-rooms within, intensely cold, but clean and hospitably prepared for guests. Finally, there was a parlor for guests to sit in and to sup in, where a table was already laid, and where a blazing fire shone red and high.

In this room, after having had their quarters for the night allotted to them by two young Fathers, the travellers presently drew round the hearth.

They were in three parties; of whom the first, as the most numerous and important, was the slowest, and had been overtaken by one of the others on the way up. It consisted of an elderly lady, two gray-haired gentlemen, two young ladies, and their brother. These were attended (not to mention four guides) by a courier, two footmen, and two waiting-maids; which strong body of inconvenience was accommodated elsewhere under the same roof. The party that had overtaken them, and followed in their train, consisted of only three members: one lady and two gentlemen. The third party, which had ascended from the valley on the Italian side of the Pass, and had arrived first, were four in number: a plethoric, hungry, and silent German tutor in spectacles, on a tour with three young men, his pupils, all plethoric, hungry, and silent, and all in spectacles.

These three groups sat round the fire eying each other dryly, and waiting for supper. Only one among them, one of the gentlemen belonging to the party of three, made advances towards conversation. Throwing out his lines for the Chief of the important tribe, while addressing himself to his own companions, he remarked, in a tone of voice which included all the company if they chose to be included, that it had been a long day, and that he felt for the ladies. That he feared one of the young ladies was not a strong or accustomed traveller, and had been over-fatigued two or three hours ago. That he had observed, from his station in the rear, that she sat her mule as if she were exhausted. That he had, twice or thrice afterwards, done himself the honor of inquiring of one of the

guides, when he fell behind, how the young lady did. That he had been enchanted to learn that she had recovered her spirits, and that it had been but a passing discomfort. That he trusted (by this time he had secured the eyes of the Chief, and addressed him) he might be permitted to express his hope that she was now none the worse, and that she would not regret having made the journey.

"My daughter, I am obliged to you, sir," returned the Chief, "is quite restored, and has been greatly interested."

"New to mountains, perhaps?" said the insinuating traveller.

"New to — ha — to mountains," said the Chief.

"But you are familiar with them, sir?" the insinuating traveller assumed.

"I am — hum — tolerably familiar. Not of late years. Not of late years," replied the Chief with a flourish of his hand.

The insinuating traveller, acknowledging the flourish with an inclination of his head, passed from the Chief to the second young lady, who had not yet been referred to, otherwise than as one of the ladies in whose behalf he felt so sensitive an interest.

He hoped she was not incommoded by the fatigues of the day.

"Incommoded, certainly," returned the young lady, "but not tired."

The insinuating traveller complimented her on the justice of the distinction. It was what he had meant to say. Every lady must doubtless be incommoded by having to do with that proverbially unaccommodating animal, the mule.

"We have had, of course," said the young lady, who was rather reserved and haughty, "to leave the carriages and fourgon at Martigny. And the impossibility of bringing anything that one wants to this inaccessible place, and the necessity of leaving every comfort behind, is not convenient."

"A savage place indeed," said the insinuating traveller.

The elderly lady, who was a model of accurate dressing, and whose manner was perfect, considered as a piece of machinery, here interposed a remark in a low soft voice.

"But, like other inconvenient places," she observed, "it must be seen. As a place much spoken of, it is necessary to see it."

"Oh! I have not the least objection to seeing it, I assure you, Mrs. General," returned the other carelessly.

"You, madam," said the insinuating traveller, "have visited this spot before?"

"Yes," returned Mrs. General. "I have been here before. Let me recommend you, my dear," to the former young lady, "to shade your face from the hot wood after exposure to the mountain air and snow. You too, my dear," to the other and younger lady, who immediately did so; while the former merely said, "Thank you, Mrs. General, I am perfectly comfortable, and prefer remaining as I am."

The brother, who had left his chair to open a piano that stood in the room, and who had whistled into it and shut it up again, now came strolling back to the fire with his glass in his eye. He was dressed in the very fullest and completest travelling trim. The world seemed hardly large enough to

yield him an amount of travel proportionate to his equipment.

"These fellows are an immense time with supper," he drawled. "I wonder what they'll give us! Has anybody any idea?"

"Not roast man, I believe," replied the voice of the second gentleman of the party of three.

"I suppose not. What d'ye mean?" he inquired.

"That, as you are not to be served for the general supper, perhaps you will do us the favor of not cooking yourself at the general fire," returned the other.

The young gentleman, who was standing in an easy attitude on the hearth, cocking his glass at the company, with his back to the blaze and his coat tucked under his arms, something as if he were of the poultry species, and were trussed for roasting, lost countenance at this reply; he seemed about to demand further explanation, when it was discovered — through all eyes turning on the speaker — that the lady with him, who was young and beautiful, had not heard what had passed, through having fainted with her head upon his shoulder.

"I think," said the gentleman in a subdued tone, "I had best carry her straight to her room. Will you call to some one to bring a light," addressing his companion, "and to show the way? In this strange rambling place I don't know that I could find it."

"Pray let me call my maid," cried the taller of the young ladies.

"Pray let me put this water to her lips," said the shorter, who had not spoken yet.

Each doing what she suggested, there was no want

of assistance. Indeed, when the two maids came in (escorted by the courier, lest any one should strike them dumb by addressing a foreign language to them on the road), there was a prospect of too much assistance. Seeing this, and saying as much in a few words to the slighter and younger of the two ladies, the gentleman put his wife's arm over his shoulder, lifted her up, and carried her away.

His friend, being left alone with the other visitors, walked slowly up and down the room, without coming to the fire again, pulling his black mustache in a contemplative manner, as if he felt himself committed to the late retort. While the subject of it was breathing injury in a corner, the Chief loftily addressed this gentleman.

"Your friend, sir," said he, "is — ha — is a little impatient; and, in his impatience, is not perhaps fully sensible of what he owes to — hum — to — but we will waive that, we will waive that. Your friend is a little impatient, sir."

"It may be so, sir," returned the other. "But having had the honor of making that gentleman's acquaintance at the hotel at Geneva, where we and much good company met some time ago, and having had the honor of exchanging company and conversation with that gentleman on several subsequent excursions, I can hear nothing — no, not even from one of your appearance and station, sir — detrimental to that gentleman."

"You are in no danger, sir, of hearing any such thing from me. In remarking that your friend has shown impatience, I say no such thing. I make that remark, because it is not to be doubted that my son, being by birth and by — ha — by education a

— hum — a gentleman, would have readily adapted himself to any obligingly-expressed wish on the subject of the fire being equally accessible to the whole of the present circle. Which, in principle, I — ha — for all are — hum — equal on these occasions—I consider right."

"Good!" was the reply. "And there it ends! I am your son's obedient servant. I beg your son to receive the assurance of my profound consideration. And now, sir, I may admit, freely admit, that my friend is sometimes of a sarcastic temper."

"The lady is your friend's wife, sir?"

"The lady is my friend's wife, sir."

"She is very handsome."

"Sir, she is peerless. They are still in the first year of their marriage. They are still partly on a marriage, and partly on an artistic, tour."

"Your friend is an artist, sir?"

The gentleman replied by kissing the fingers of his right hand, and wafting the kiss the length of his arm towards Heaven. As who should say, I devote him to the celestial Powers as an immortal artist!

"But he is a man of family," he added. "His connections are of the best. He is more than an artist: he is highly connected. He may, in effect, have repudiated his connections proudly, impatiently, sarcastically (I make the concession of both words); but he has them. Sparks that have been struck out during our intercourse have shown me this."

"Well! I hope," said the lofty gentleman, with the air of finally disposing of the subject, "that the lady's indisposition may be only temporary."

"Sir, I hope so."

"Mere fatigue, I dare say."

"Not altogether mere fatigue, sir, for her mule stumbled to-day, and she fell from the saddle. She fell lightly, and was up again without assistance, and rode from us laughing; but she complained towards evening of a slight bruise in the side. She spoke of it more than once, as we followed your party up the mountain."

The head of the large retinue, who was gracious, but not familiar, appeared by this time to think that he had condescended more than enough. He said no more, and there was silence for some quarter of an hour, until supper appeared.

With the supper came one of the young Fathers (there seemed to be no old Fathers) to take the head of the table. It was like the supper of an ordinary Swiss hotel, and good red wine grown by the convent in more genial air was not wanting. The artist traveller calmly came and took his place at table when the rest sat down, with no apparent sense upon him of his late skirmish with the completely dressed traveller.

"Pray," he inquired of the host over his soup, "has your convent many of its famous dogs now?"

"Monsieur, it has three."

"I saw three in the gallery below. Doubtless the three in question."

The host, a slender, bright-eyed, dark young man of polite manners, whose garment was a black gown with strips of white crossed over it like braces, and who no more resembled the conventional breed of Saint Bernard monks than he resembled the conventional breed of Saint Bernard dogs, replied, doubtless those were the three in question.

"And I think," said the artist traveller, "I have seen one of them before."

It was possible. He was a dog sufficiently well known. Monsieur might have easily seen him in the valley, or somewhere on the lake, when he (the dog) had gone down with one of the order to solicit aid for the convent.

"Which is done in its regular season of the year, I think."

Monsieur was right.

"And never without the dog. The dog is very important."

Again monsieur was right. The dog was very important. People were justly interested in the dog. As one of the dogs celebrated everywhere, mam'selle would observe.

Mam'selle was a little slow to observe it, as though she were not yet well accustomed to the French tongue. Mrs. General, however, observed it for her.

"Ask him if he has saved many lives?" said, in his native English, the young man who had been put out of countenance.

The host needed no translation of the question. He promptly replied in French, "No. Not this one."

"Why not?" the same gentleman asked.

"Pardon," returned the host composedly, "give him the opportunity, and he will do it without doubt. For example, I am well convinced," smiling sedately, as he cut up the dish of veal to be handed round, on the young man who had been put out of countenance, "that if you, monsieur, would give him the opportunity, he would hasten with great ardor to fulfil his duty."

The artist traveller laughed. The insinuating traveller (who evinced a provident anxiety to get his full share of the supper), wiping some drops of wine from his mustache with a piece of bread, joined the conversation.

"It is becoming late in the year, my Father," said he, "for tourist travellers, is it not?"

"Yes, it is late. Yet two or three weeks, at most, and we shall be left to the winter snows."

"And then," said the insinuating traveller, "for the scratching dogs and the buried children, according to the pictures!"

"Pardon," said the host, not quite understanding the allusion. "How then the scratching dogs and the buried children, according to the pictures?"

The artist traveller struck in again before an answer could be given.

"Don't you know," he coldly inquired across the table of his companion, "that none but smugglers come this way in the winter, or can have any possible business this way?"

"Holy blue! No; never heard of it."

"So it is, I believe. And, as they know the signs of the weather tolerably well, they don't give much employment to the dogs — who have consequently died out rather — though this house of entertainment is conveniently situated for themselves. Their young families, I am told, they usually leave at home. But it's a grand idea!" cried the artist traveller, unexpectedly rising into a tone of enthusiasm. "It's a sublime idea! It's the finest idea in the world, and brings tears into a man's eyes, by Jupiter!" He then went on eating his veal with great composure.

There was enough of mocking inconsistency at the bottom of this speech to make it rather discordant, though the manner was refined and the person well favored, and though the depreciatory part of it was so skilfully thrown off as to be very difficult for one not perfectly acquainted with the English language to understand, or, even understanding, to take offence at: so simple and dispassionate was its tone. After finishing his veal in the midst of silence, the speaker again addressed his friend.

"Look," said he in his former tone, "at this gentleman our host, not yet in the prime of life, who in so graceful a way, and with such courtly urbanity and modesty, presides over us! Manners fit for a crown! Dine with the Lord Mayor of London (if you can get an invitation), and observe the contrast. This dear fellow, with the finest-cut face I ever saw, a face in perfect drawing, leaves some laborious life, and comes up here I don't know how many feet above the level of the sea, for no other purpose on earth (except enjoying himself, I hope, in a capital refectory) than to keep an hotel for idle poor devils like you and me, and leave the bill to our consciences! Why, isn't it a beautiful sacrifice? What do we want more to touch us? Because rescued people of interesting appearance are not, for eight or nine months out of every twelve, holding on here round the necks of the most sagacious of dogs carrying wooden bottles, shall we disparage the place? No! Bless the place! It's a great place, a glorious place!"

The chest of the gray-haired gentleman who was the Chief of the important party, had swelled as if with a protest against his being numbered among

poor devils. No sooner had the artist traveller ceased speaking than he himself spoke with great dignity, as having it incumbent on him to take the lead in most places, and having deserted that duty for a little while.

He weightily communicated his opinion to their host that his life must be a very dreary life here in the winter.

The host allowed to monsieur that it was a little monotonous. The air was difficult to breathe for a length of time consecutively. The cold was very severe. One needed youth and strength to bear it. However, having them and the blessing of Heaven —

Yes, that was very good. "But the confinement," said the gray-haired gentleman.

There were many days, even in bad weather, when it was possible to walk about outside. It was the custom to beat a little track, and take exercise there.

"But the space," urged the gray-haired gentleman. "So small. So — ha — very limited."

Monsieur would recall to himself that there were the refuges to visit, and that tracks had to be made to them also.

Monsieur still urged, on the other hand, that the space was so — ha — hum — so very contracted. More than that. It was always the same, always the same.

With a deprecating smile, the host gently raised and gently lowered his shoulders. That was true, he remarked, but permit him to say that almost all objects had their various points of view. Monsieur and he did not see this poor life of his from the same point of view. Monsieur was not used to confinement.

"I — ha — yes, very true," said the gray-haired gentleman. He seemed to receive quite a shock from the force of the argument.

Monsieur, as an English traveller surrounded by all means of travelling pleasantly; doubtless possessing fortune, carriages, servants —

"Perfectly, perfectly. Without doubt," said the gentleman.

Monsieur could not easily place himself in the position of a person who had not the power to choose, I will go here to-morrow, or there next day; I will pass these barriers, I will enlarge those bounds. Monsieur could not realize, perhaps, how the mind accommodated itself in such things to the force of necessity.

"It is true," said monsieur. "We will — ha — not pursue the subject. You are — hum — quite accurate, I have no doubt. We will say no more."

The supper having come to a close, he drew his chair away as he spoke, and moved back to his former place by the fire. As it was very cold at the greater part of the table, the other guests also resumed their former seats by the fire, designing to toast themselves well before going to bed. The host, when they rose from table, bowed to all present, wished them good-night, and withdrew. But first the insinuating traveller had asked him if they could have some wine made hot; and, as he had answered Yes, and had presently afterwards sent it in, that traveller, seated in the centre of the group, and in the full heat of the fire, was soon engaged in serving it out to the rest.

At this time the younger of the two young ladies, who had been silently attentive in her dark corner

(the fire-light was the chief light in the sombre room, the lamp being smoky and dull) to what had been said of the absent lady, glided out. She was at a loss which way to turn when she had softly closed the door; but, after a little hesitation among the sounding passages and the many ways, came to a room in a corner of the main gallery, where the servants were at their supper. From these she obtained a lamp, and a direction to the lady's room.

It was up the great staircase on the story above. Here and there, the bare white walls were broken by an iron grate, and she thought as she went along that the place was something like a prison. The arched door of the lady's room, or cell, was not quite shut. After knocking at it two or three times without receiving an answer, she pushed it gently open, and looked in.

The lady lay with closed eyes on the outside of the bed, protected from the cold by the blankets and wrappers with which she had been covered when she revived from her fainting fit. A dull light placed in the deep recess of the window made little impression on the arched room. The visitor timidly stepped to the bed, and said, in a soft whisper, "Are you better?"

The lady had fallen into a slumber, and the whisper was too low to awake her. Her visitor, standing quite still, looked at her attentively.

"She is very pretty," she said to herself. "I never saw so beautiful a face. Oh, how unlike me!"

It was a curious thing to say, but it had some hidden meaning, for it filled her eyes with tears.

"I know I must be right. I know he spoke of

her that evening. I could very easily be wrong on any other subject, but not on this, not on this!"

With a quiet and tender hand she put aside a straying fold of the sleeper's hair, and then touched the hand that lay outside the covering.

"I like to look at her," she breathed to herself. "I like to see what has affected him so much."

She had not withdrawn her hand, when the sleeper opened her eyes, and started.

"Pray don't be alarmed. I am only one of the travellers from down-stairs. I came to ask if you were better, and if I could do anything for you."

"I think you have already been so kind as to send your servants to my assistance?"

"No, not I; that was my sister. Are you better?"

"Much better. It is only a slight bruise, and has been well looked to, and is almost easy now. It made me giddy and faint in a moment. It had hurt me before; but at last it overpowered me all at once."

"May I stay with you until some one comes? Would you like it?"

"I should like it, for it is lonely here; but I am afraid you will feel the cold too much."

"I don't mind cold. I am not delicate, if I look so." She quickly moved one of the two rough chairs to the bedside, and sat down. The other as quickly moved a part of some travelling wrapper from herself, and drew it over her, so that her arm, in keeping it about her, rested on her shoulder.

"You have so much the air of a kind nurse," said the lady, smiling on her, "that you seem as if you had come to me from home."

"I am very glad of it."

"I was dreaming of home when I woke just now. Of my old home, I mean, before I was married."

"And before you were so far away from it."

"I have been much farther away from it than this; but then I took the best part of it with me, and missed nothing. I felt solitary as I dropped asleep here, and, missing it a little, wandered back to it."

There was a sorrowfully affectionate and regretful sound in her voice, which made her visitor refrain from looking at her for the moment.

"It is a curious chance which at last brings us together, under this covering in which you have wrapped me," said the visitor after a pause; "for, do you know, I think I have been looking for you some time."

"Looking for me?"

"I believe I have a little note here, which I was to give to you whenever I found you. This is it. Unless I greatly mistake, it is addressed to you. Is it not?"

The lady took it, and said yes, and read it. Her visitor watched her as she did so. It was very short. She flushed a little as she put her lips to her visitor's cheek, and pressed her hand.

"The dear young friend to whom he presents me may be a comfort to me at some time, he says. She is truly a comfort to me the first time I see her."

"Perhaps you don't," said the visitor, hesitating —"perhaps you don't know my story? Perhaps he never told you my story?"

"No."

"Oh no, why should he? I have scarcely the right to tell it myself at present, because I have been entreated not to do so. There is not much in it, but it might account to you for my asking you not to say anything about the letter here. You saw my family with me, perhaps? Some of them — I only say this to you — are a little proud, a little prejudiced."

"You shall take it back again," said the other; "and then my husband is sure not to see it. He might see it and speak of it, otherwise, by some accident. Will you put it in your bosom again, to be certain?"

She did so with great care. Her small, slight hand was still upon the letter, when they heard some one in the gallery outside.

"I promised," said the visitor, rising, "that I would write to him after seeing you (I could hardly fail to see you, sooner or later), and tell him if you were well and happy. I had better say you were well and happy."

"Yes, yes, yes! Say I was very well and very happy. And that I thanked him affectionately, and would never forget him."

"I shall see you in the morning. After that we are sure to meet again before very long. Good-night!"

"Good-night! Thank you, thank you! Good-night, my dear!"

Both of them were hurried and fluttered as they exchanged this parting, and as the visitor came out at the door. She had expected to meet the lady's husband approaching it; but the person in the gallery was not he: it was the traveller who had wiped

the wine-drops from his mustache with a piece of bread. When he heard the step behind him he turned round — for he was walking away in the dark.

His politeness, which was extreme, would not allow of the young lady's lighting herself down-stairs, or going down alone. He took her lamp, held it so as to throw the best light on the stone steps, and followed her all the way to the supper-room. She went down, not easily hiding how much she was inclined to shrink and tremble; for the appearance of this traveller was particularly disagreeable to her. She had sat in her quiet corner before supper, imagining what he would have been in the scenes and places within her experience, until he inspired her with an aversion that made him little less than terrific.

He followed her down with his smiling politeness, followed her in, and resumed his seat in the best place on the hearth. There, with the wood fire, which was beginning to burn low, rising and falling upon him in the dark room, he sat with his legs thrust out to warm, drinking the hot wine down to the lees, with a monstrous shadow imitating him on the wall and ceiling.

The tired company had broken up, and all the rest were gone to bed except the young lady's father, who dozed in his chair by the fire. The traveller had been at the pains of going a long way up-stairs to his sleeping-room, to fetch his pocket-flask of brandy. He told them so as he poured its contents into what was left of the wine, and drank with a new relish.

"May I ask, sir, if you are on your way to Italy?"

The gray-haired gentleman had roused himself, and was preparing to withdraw. He answered in the affirmative.

"I also!" said the traveller. "I shall hope to have the honor of offering my compliments in fairer scenes, and under softer circumstances, than on this dismal mountain."

The gentleman bowed, distantly enough, and said he was obliged to him.

"We poor gentlemen, sir," said the traveller, pulling his mustache dry with his hand, for he had dipped it in the wine and brandy; "we poor gentlemen do not travel like princes, but the courtesies and graces of life are precious to us. To your health, sir!"

"Sir, I thank you."

"To the health of your distinguished family — of the fair ladies, your daughters!"

"Sir, I thank you again. I wish you good-night. My dear, are our — ha — our people in attendance?"

"They are close by, father."

"Permit me!" said the traveller, rising and holding the door open, as the gentleman crossed the room towards it with his arm drawn through his daughter's. "Good repose! To the pleasure of seeing you once more! To to-morrow!"

As he kissed his hand with his best manner and his daintiest smile, the young lady drew a little nearer to her father, and passed him with a dread of touching him.

"Humph!" said the insinuating traveller, whose manner shrunk, and whose voice dropped, when he was left alone. "If they all go to bed, why, I must go. They are in a devil of a hurry. One would

think the night would be long enough, in this freezing silence and solitude, if one went to bed two hours hence!"

Throwing back his head in emptying his glass, he cast his eyes upon the travellers' book, which lay on the piano, open, with pens and ink beside it, as if the night's names had been registered when he was absent. Taking it in his hand, he read these entries:

William Dorrit, Esquire Frederick Dorrit, Esquire Edward Dorrit, Esquire Miss Dorrit Miss Amy Dorrit Mrs. General	And suite. From France to Italy.

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Gowan. From France to Italy.

To which he added, in a small complicated hand, ending with a long lean flourish, not unlike a lasso thrown at all the rest of the names:

Blandois. Paris. From France to Italy.

And then, with his nose coming down over his mustache, and his mustache going up under his nose, repaired to his allotted cell.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. GENERAL.

It is indispensable to present the accomplished lady who was of sufficient importance in the suite of the Dorrit family to have a line to herself in the travellers' book.

Mrs. General was the daughter of a clerical dignitary in a cathedral town, where she had led the fashion until she was as near forty-five as a single lady can be. A stiff commissariat officer of sixty, famous as a martinet, had then become enamoured of the gravity with which she drove the proprieties four-in-hand through the cathedral-town society, and had solicited to be taken beside her on the box of the cool coach of ceremony to which that team was harnessed. His proposal of marriage being accepted by the lady, the commissary took his seat behind the proprieties with great decorum, and Mrs. General drove until the commissary died. In the course of their united journey they ran over several people who came in the way of the proprieties; but always in a high style, and with composure.

The commissary having been buried with all the decorations suitable to the service (the whole team of proprieties were harnessed to his hearse, and they

all had feathers and black velvet housings, with his coat-of-arms in the corner), Mrs. General began to inquire what quantity of dust and ashes was deposited at the bankers'. It then transpired that the commissary had so far stolen a march on Mrs. General as to have bought himself an annuity some years before his marriage, and to have reserved that circumstance, in mentioning, at the period of his proposal, that his income was derived from the interest of his money. Mrs. General consequently found her means so much diminished that, but for the perfect regulation of her mind, she might have felt disposed to question the accuracy of that portion of the late service which had declared that the commissary could take nothing away with him.

In this state of affairs it occurred to Mrs. General that she might "form the mind," and eke the manners, of some young lady of distinction. Or, that she might harness the proprieties to the carriage of some rich young heiress or widow, and become at once the driver and guard of such vehicle through the social mazes. Mrs. General's communication of this idea to her clerical and commissariat connection was so warmly applauded that, but for the lady's undoubted merit, it might have appeared as though they wanted to get rid of her. Testimonials representing Mrs. General as a prodigy of piety, learning, virtue, and gentility, were lavishly contributed from influential quarters; and one venerable archdeacon even shed tears in recording his testimony to her perfections (described to him by persons on whom he could rely), though he had never had the honor and moral gratification of setting eyes on Mrs. General in all his life.

Thus delegated on her mission, as it were by Church and State, Mrs. General, who had always occupied high ground, felt in a condition to keep it, and began by putting herself up at a very high figure. An interval of some duration elapsed, in which there was no bid for Mrs. General. At length a county widower, with a daughter of fourteen, opened negotiations with the lady; and, as it was a part either of the native dignity or of the artificial policy of Mrs. General (but certainly one or the other) to comport herself as if she were much more sought than seeking, the widower pursued Mrs. General until he prevailed upon her to form his daughter's mind and manners.

The execution of this trust occupied Mrs. General about seven years, in the course of which time she made the tour of Europe, and saw most of that extensive miscellany of objects which it is essential that all persons of polite cultivation should see with other people's eyes, and never with their own. When her charge was at length formed, the marriage not only of the young lady, but likewise of her father the widower, was resolved on. The widower, then finding Mrs. General both inconvenient and expensive, became of a sudden almost as much affected by her merits as the archdeacon had been, and circulated such praises of her surpassing worth in all quarters where he thought an opportunity might arise of transferring the blessing to somebody else, that Mrs. General was a name more honorable than ever.

The phœnix was to let, on this elevated perch, when Mr. Dorrit, who had lately succeeded to his property, mentioned to his bankers that he wished to

discover a lady, well bred, accomplished, well connected, well accustomed to good society, who was qualified at once to complete the education of his daughters, and to be their matron or chaperone. Mr. Dorrit's bankers, as the bankers of the county widower, instantly said, "Mrs. General."

Pursuing the light so fortunately hit upon, and finding the concurrent testimony of the whole of Mrs. General's acquaintance to be of the pathetic nature already recorded, Mr. Dorrit took the trouble of going down to the county of the county widower, to see Mrs. General. In whom he found a lady of a quality superior to his highest expectations.

"Might I be excused," said Mr. Dorrit, "if I inquired — ha — what remune—"

"Why, indeed," returned Mrs. General, stopping the word, "it is a subject on which I prefer to avoid entering. I have never entered on it with my friends here; and I cannot overcome the delicacy, Mr. Dorrit, with which I have always regarded it. I am not, as I hope you are aware, a governess" —

"Oh dear no!" said Mr. Dorrit. "Pray, madam, do not imagine for a moment that I think so." He really blushed to be suspected of it.

Mrs. General gravely inclined her head. "I cannot, therefore, put a price upon services which it is a pleasure to me to render if I can render them spontaneously, but which I could not render in mere return for any consideration. Neither do I know how, or where, to find a case parallel to my own. It is peculiar."

No doubt. But how, then (Mr. Dorrit not unnaturally hinted), could the subject be approached?

"I cannot object," said Mrs. General — "though

even that is disagreeable to me — to Mr. Dorrit's inquiring, in confidence, of my friends here, what amount they may have been accustomed, at quarterly intervals, to pay to my credit at my bankers'."

Mr. Dorrit bowed his acknowledgments.

"Permit me to add," said Mrs. General, "that beyond this I can never resume the topic. Also that I can accept no second or inferior position. If the honor were proposed to me of becoming known to Mr. Dorrit's family — I think two daughters were mentioned?"

"Two daughters."

"I could only accept it on terms of perfect equality, as a companion, protector, Mentor, and friend."

Mr. Dorrit, in spite of his sense of his importance, felt as if it would be quite a kindness in her to accept it on any conditions. He almost said as much.

"I think," repeated Mrs. General, "two daughters were mentioned?"

"Two daughters," said Mr. Dorrit again.

"It would therefore," said Mrs. General, "be necessary to add a third more to the payment (whatever its amount may prove to be), which my friends here have been accustomed to make to my bankers."

Mr. Dorrit lost no time in referring the delicate question to the county widower, and, finding that he had been accustomed to pay three hundred pounds a year to the credit of Mrs. General, arrived, without any severe strain on his arithmetic, at the conclusion that he himself must pay four. Mrs. General being an article of that lustrous surface which suggests that it is worth any money, he made a formal

proposal to be allowed to have the honor and pleasure of regarding her as a member of his family. Mrs. General conceded that high privilege, and here she was.

In person, Mrs. General, including her skirts, which had much to do with it, was of a dignified and imposing appearance; ample, rustling, gravely voluminous; always upright behind the proprieties. She might have been taken — had been taken — to the top of the Alps and the bottom of Herculaneum without disarranging a fold in her dress, or displacing a pin. If her countenance and hair had rather a floury appearance, as though from living in some transcendently genteel Mill, it was rather because she was a chalky creation altogether than because she mended her complexion with violet powder, or had turned gray. If her eyes had no expression, it was probably because they had nothing to express. If she had few wrinkles, it was because her mind had never traced its name or any other inscription on her face. A cool, waxy, blown-out woman, who had never lighted well.

Mrs. General had no opinions. Her way of forming a mind was to prevent it from forming opinions. She had a little circular set of mental grooves or rails, on which she started little trains of other people's opinions, which never overtook one another, and never got anywhere. Even her propriety could not dispute that there was impropriety in the world; but Mrs. General's way of getting rid of it was to put it out of sight, and make believe that there was no such thing. This was another of her ways of forming a mind — to cram all articles of difficulty into cupboards, lock them up, and say they had no

existence. It was the easiest way, and, beyond all comparison, the properest.

Mrs. General was not to be told of anything shocking. Accidents, miseries, and offences were never to be mentioned before her. Passion was to go to sleep in the presence of Mrs. General, and blood was to change to milk-and-water. The little that was left in the world, when all these deductions were made, it was Mrs. General's province to varnish. In that formation process of hers, she dipped the smallest of brushes into the largest of pots, and varnished the surface of every object that came under consideration. The more cracked it was, the more Mrs. General varnished it.

There was varnish in Mrs. General's voice, varnish in Mrs. General's touch, an atmosphere of varnish round Mrs. General's figure. Mrs. General's dreams ought to have been varnished, — if she had any, — lying asleep in the arms of the good Saint Bernard, with the feathery snow falling on his housetop.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE ROAD.

The bright morning sun dazzled the eyes, the snow had ceased, the mists had vanished, the mountain air was so clear and light that the new sensation of breathing it was like the having entered on a new existence. To help the delusion, the solid ground itself seemed gone, and the mountain, a shining waste of immense white heaps and masses, to be a region of cloud floating between the blue sky above and the earth far below.

Some dark specks in the snow, like knots upon a little thread, beginning at the convent door, and winding away down the descent in broken lengths which were not yet pieced together, showed where the Brethren were at work in several places clearing the track. Already the snow had begun to be foot-thawed again about the door. Mules were busily brought out, tied to the rings in the wall, and laden; strings of bells were buckled on, burdens were adjusted, the voices of drivers and riders sounded musically. Some of the earliest had even already resumed their journey; and, both on the level summit by the dark water near the convent, and on the downward way of yesterday's ascent, little moving

figures of men and mules, reduced to miniatures by the immensity around, went with a clear tinkling of bells and a pleasant harmony of tongues.

In the supper-room of last night, a new fire, piled upon the feathery ashes of the old one, shone upon a homely breakfast of loaves, butter, and milk. It also shone on the courier of the Dorrit family, making tea for his party from a supply he had brought up with him, together with several other small stores which were chiefly laid in for the use of the strong body of inconvenience. Mr. Gowan, and Blandois of Paris, had already breakfasted, and were walking up and down by the lake, smoking their cigars.

"Gowan, eh?" muttered Tip, otherwise Edward Dorrit, Esquire, turning over the leaves of the book, when the courier had left them to breakfast. "Then Gowan is the name of a puppy, that's all I have got to say! If it was worth my while, I'd pull his nose. But it isn't worth my while — fortunately for him. How's his wife, Amy? I suppose you know. You generally know things of that sort."

"She is better, Edward. But they are not going to-day."

"Oh! They are not going to-day! Fortunately for that fellow too," said Tip, "or he and I might have come into collision."

"It is thought better here that she should lie quiet to-day, and not be fatigued and shaken by the ride down until to-morrow."

"With all my heart. But you talk as if you had been nursing her. You haven't been relapsing into (Mrs. General is not here) into old habits, have you, Amy?"

He asked her the question with a sly glance of observation at Miss Fanny, and at his father too.

"I have only been in to ask her if I could do anything for her, Tip," said Little Dorrit.

"You needn't call me Tip, Amy child," returned that young gentleman with a frown; "because that's an old habit, and one you may as well lay aside."

"I didn't mean to say so, Edward dear. I forgot. It was so natural once, that it seemed at the moment the right word."

"Oh yes!" Miss Fanny struck in. "Natural, the right word, and once, and all the rest of it! Nonsense, you little thing! I know perfectly well why you have been taking such an interest in this Mrs. Gowan. You can't blind *me*."

"I will not try to, Fanny. Don't be angry."

"Oh! angry!" returned that young lady with a flounce. "I have no patience" (which, indeed, was the truth).

"Pray, Fanny," said Mr. Dorrit, raising his eyebrows, "what do you mean? Explain yourself."

"Oh! Never mind, pa," replied Miss Fanny, "it's no great matter. Amy will understand me. She knew, or knew of, this Mrs. Gowan, before yesterday, and she may as well admit that she did."

"My child," said Mr. Dorrit, turning to his younger daughter, "has your sister — any — ha — authority for this curious statement?"

"However meek we are," Miss Fanny struck in before she could answer, "we don't go creeping into people's rooms on the tops of cold mountains, and sitting perishing in the frost with people, unless we

know something about them beforehand. It's not very hard to divine whose friend Mrs. Gowan is."

"Whose friend?" inquired her father.

"Pa, I am sorry to say," returned Miss Fanny, who had by this time succeeded in goading herself into a state of much ill-usage and grievance, which she was often at great pains to do, "that I believe her to be a friend of that very objectionable and unpleasant person, who, with a total absence of all delicacy, which our experience might have led us to expect from him, insulted us and outraged our feelings in so public and wilful a manner, on an occasion to which it is understood among us that we will not more pointedly allude."

"Amy, my child," said Mr. Dorrit, tempering a bland severity with a dignified affection, "is this the case?"

Little Dorrit mildly answered, yes, it was.

"Yes, it is," cried Miss Fanny. "Of course! I said so! And now, pa, I do declare once for all;" this young lady was in the habit of declaring the same thing once for all every day of her life, and even several times in a day, "that this is shameful! I do declare once for all that it ought to be put a stop to. Is it not enough that we have gone through what is only known to ourselves, but are we to have it thrown in our faces, perseveringly and systematically, by the very person who should spare our feelings most? Are we to be exposed to this unnatural conduct every moment of our lives? Are we never to be permitted to forget? I say again, it is absolutely infamous!"

"Well, Amy," observed her brother, shaking his head, "you know I stand by you whenever I can,

and on most occasions. But I must say that upon my soul I do consider it rather an unaccountable mode of showing your sisterly affection, that you should back up a man who treated me in the most ungentlemanly way in which one man can treat another. And who," he added convincingly, "must be a low-minded thief, you know, or he never could have conducted himself as he did."

"And see," said Miss Fanny, "see what is involved in this! Can we ever hope to be respected by our servants? Never. Here are our two women, and pa's valet, and a footman, and a courier, and all sorts of dependents, and yet, in the midst of these, we are to have one of ourselves rushing about with tumblers of cold water like a menial! Why, a policeman," said Miss Fanny, "if a beggar had a fit in the street, could but go plunging about with tumblers, as this very Amy did in this very room before our very eyes last night!"

"I don't so much mind that, once in a way," remarked Mr. Edward; "but your Clennam, as he thinks proper to call himself, is another thing."

"He is a part of the same thing," returned Miss Fanny, "and of a piece with all the rest. He obtruded himself upon us in the first instance. We never wanted him. I always showed him, for one, that I could have dispensed with his company with the greatest pleasure. He then commits that gross outrage upon our feelings, which he never could or would have committed but for the delight he took in exposing us; and then we are to be demeaned for the service of his friends! Why, I don't wonder at this Mr. Gowan's conduct towards you. What else was to be expected when he was

enjoying our past misfortunes — gloating over them at the moment?"

"Father — Edward — no, indeed!" pleaded Little Dorrit. "Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Gowan had ever heard our name. They were, and they are, quite ignorant of our history."

"So much the worse," retorted Fanny, determined not to admit anything in extenuation, "for then you have *no* excuse. If they had known about us, you might have felt yourself called upon to conciliate them. That would have been a weak and ridiculous mistake, but I can respect a mistake, whereas I can't respect a wilful and deliberate abasing of those who should be nearest and dearest to us. No. I can't respect that. I can do nothing but denounce that."

"I never offend you wilfully, Fanny," said Little Dorrit, "though you are so hard with me."

"Then you should be more careful, Amy," returned her sister. "If you do such things by accident, you should be more careful. If I happened to have been born in a peculiar place, and under peculiar circumstances that blunted my knowledge of propriety, I fancy I should think myself bound to consider at every step, 'Am I going, ignorantly, to compromise any near and dear relations?' That is what I fancy *I* should do, if it was *my* case."

Mr. Dorrit now interposed, at once to stop these painful subjects by his authority, and to point their moral by his wisdom.

"My dear," said he to his younger daughter, "I beg you to — ha — to say no more. Your sister Fanny expresses herself strongly, but not without considerable reason. You have now a — hum — a great position to support. That great position is

not occupied by yourself alone, but by — ha — by me, and — ha, hum — by us. Us. Now, it is incumbent upon all people in an exalted position, but it is particularly so on this family, for reasons which I — ha — will not dwell upon, to make themselves respected. To be vigilant in making themselves re-
cted. Dependents, to respect us, must be — ha
ept at a distance, and — hum — kept down.
n. Therefore, your not exposing yourself to
emarks of our attendants, by appearing to
at any time dispensed with their services and
med them for yourself, is — ha — highly
rant."

Why, who can doubt it?" cried Miss Fanny.
the essence of everything!"

anny," returned her father grandiloquently,
e me leave, my dear. We then come to — ha
Mr. Clennam. I am free to say that I do not,
y, share your sister's sentiments — that is to
, altogether — hum — altogether — in reference to Mr. Clennam. I am content to regard that individual in the light of — ha — generally — a well-behaved person. Hum. A well-behaved person. Nor will I inquire whether Mr. Clennam did, at any time, obtrude himself on — ha — my society. He knew my society to be — hum — sought, and his plea might be that he regarded me in the light of a public character. But there were circumstances attending my — ha — slight knowledge of Mr. Clennam (it was very slight), which," here Mr. Dorrit became extremely grave and impressive, "would render it highly indelicate in Mr. Clennam to — ha — to seek to renew communication with me, or with any member of my family, under existing cir-

cumstances. If Mr. Clennam has sufficient delicacy to perceive the impropriety of any such attempt, I am bound, as a responsible gentleman, to — ha — defer to that delicacy on his part. If, on the other hand, Mr. Clennam has not that delicacy, I cannot for a moment — ha — hold any correspondence with so — hum — coarse a mind. In either case, it would appear that Mr. Clennam is put altogether out of the question, and that we have nothing to do with him, or he with us. Ha — Mrs. General!"

The entrance of the lady whom he announced, to take her place at the breakfast-table, terminated the discussion. Shortly afterwards the courier announced that the valet, and the footman, and the two maids, and the four guides, and the fourteen mules were in readiness; so the breakfast-party went out to the convent door to join the cavalcade.

Mr. Gowan stood aloof with his cigar and pencil, but Mr. Blandois was on the spot to pay his respects to the ladies. When he gallantly pulled off his slouched hat to Little Dorrit, she thought he had even a more sinister look, standing swart and cloaked in the snow, than he had in the fire-light over-night. But as both her father and her sister received his homage with some favor, she refrained from expressing any distrust of him, lest it should prove to be a new blemish derived from her prison birth.

Nevertheless, as they wound down the rugged way while the convent was yet in sight, she more than once looked round, and descried Mr. Blandois, backed by the convent smoke which rose straight and high from the chimneys in a golden film, always standing on one jutting point looking down after

them. Long after he was a mere black stick in the snow, she felt as though she could yet see that smile of his, that high nose, and those eyes that were too near it. And even after that, when the convent was gone, and some light morning clouds veiled the pass below it, the ghastly skeleton arms by the wayside seemed to be all pointing up at him.

More treacherous than snow, perhaps colder at heart, and harder to melt, Blandois of Paris by degrees passed out of her mind as they came down into the softer regions. Again the sun was warm, again the streams descending from glaciers and snowy caverns were refreshing to drink at, again they came among the pine-trees, the rocky rivulets, the verdant heights and dales, the wooden châlets and rough zigzag fences, of Swiss country. Sometimes the way so widened that she and her father could ride abreast. And then to look at him, handsomely clothed in his furs and broadcloths, rich, free, numerously served and attended, his eyes roving far away among the glories of the landscape, no miserable screen before them to darken his sight and cast its shadow on him, was enough.

Her uncle was so far rescued from that shadow of old, that he wore the clothes they gave him, and performed some ablutions as a sacrifice to the family credit, and went where he was taken, with a certain patient animal enjoyment, which seemed to express that the air and change did him good. In all other respects, save one, he shone with no light but such as was reflected from his brother. His brother's greatness, wealth, freedom, and grandeur pleased him without any reference to himself. Silent and retiring, he had no use for speech when he could

hear his brother speak; no desire to be waited on, so that the servants devoted themselves to his brother. The only noticeable change he originated in himself was an alteration in his manner to his younger niece. Every day it refined more and more into a marked respect, very rarely shown by age to youth, and still more rarely susceptible, one would have said, of the fitness with which he invested it. On those occasions when Miss Fanny did declare once for all, he would take the next opportunity of baring his gray head before his younger niece, and of helping her to alight, or handing her to the carriage, or showing her any other attention, with the profoundest deference. Yet it never appeared misplaced or forced, being always heartily simple, spontaneous, and genuine. Neither would he ever consent, even at his brother's request, to be helped to any place before her, or to take precedence of her in anything. So jealous was he of her being respected, that on this very journey down from the Great Saint Bernard, he took sudden and violent umbrage at the footman's being remiss to hold her stirrup, though standing near when she dismounted; and unspeakably astonished the whole retinue by charging at him on a hard-headed mule, riding him into a corner and threatening to trample him to death.

They were a goodly company, and the innkeepers all but worshipped them. Wherever they went, their importance preceded them in the person of the courier riding before, to see that the rooms of state were ready. He was the herald of the family procession. The great travelling carriage came next: containing, inside, Mr. Dorrit, Miss Dorrit,

Miss Amy Dorrit, and Mrs. General; outside, some of the retainers, and (in fine weather) Edward Dorrit, Esquire, for whom the box was reserved. Then came the chariot, containing Frederick Dorrit, Esquire, and an empty place occupied by Edward Dorrit, Esquire, in wet weather. Then came the fourgon, with the rest of the retainers, the heavy baggage, and as much as it could carry of the mud and dust which the other vehicles left behind.

These equipages adorned the yard at the hotel at Martigny, on the return of the family from their mountain excursion. Other vehicles were there, much company being on the road, from the patched Italian vettura — like the body of a swing from an English fair put upon a wooden tray on wheels, and having another wooden tray without wheels put atop of it — to the trim English carriage. But there was another adornment of the hotel which Mr. Dorrit had not bargained for. Two strange travellers embellished one of his rooms.

The innkeeper, hat in hand in the yard, swore to the courier that he was blighted, that he was desolated, that he was profoundly afflicted, that he was the most miserable and unfortunate of beasts, that he had the head of a wooden pig. He ought never to have made the concession, he said, but the very genteel lady had so passionately prayed him for the accommodation of that room to dine in, only for a little half-hour, that he had been vanquished. The little half-hour was expired, the lady and gentleman were taking their little dessert and half-cup of coffee, the note was paid, the horses were ordered, they would depart immediately; but, owing to an unhappy destiny and the curse of Heaven, they were not yet gone.

Nothing could exceed Mr. Dorrit's indignation as he turned at the foot of the staircase on hearing these apologies. He felt that the family dignity was struck at by an assassin's hand. He had a sense of his dignity, which was of the most exquisite nature. He could detect a design upon it when nobody else had any perception of the fact. His life was made an agony by the number of fine scalpels that he felt to be incessantly engaged in dissecting his dignity.

"Is it possible, sir," said Mr. Dorrit, reddening excessively, "that you have — ha — had the audacity to place one of my rooms at the disposition of any other person?"

Thousands of pardons! It was the host's profound misfortune to have been overcome by that too genteel lady. He besought Monseigneur not to enrage himself. He threw himself on Monseigneur for clemency. If Monseigneur would have the distinguished goodness to occupy the other salon especially reserved for him, for but five minutes, all would go well.

"No, sir," said Mr. Dorrit. "I will not occupy any salon. I will leave your house without eating or drinking, or setting foot in it. How do you dare to act like this? Who am I, that you — ha — separate me from other gentlemen?"

Alas! The host called all the universe to witness that Monseigneur was the most amiable of the whole body of nobility, the most important, the most estimable, the most honored. If he separated Monseigneur from others, it was only because he was more distinguished, more cherished, more generous, more renowned.

"Don't tell me so, sir," returned Mr. Dorrit in a mighty heat. "You have affronted me. You have heaped insults upon me. How dare you? Explain yourself."

Ah, just Heaven, then, how could the host explain himself when he had nothing more to explain; when he had only to apologize, and confide himself to the so well-known magnanimity of Monseigneur?

"I tell you, sir," said Mr. Dorrit, panting with anger, "that you separate me — ha — from other gentlemen: that you make distinctions between me and other gentlemen of fortune and station. I demand of you why? I wish to know on — ha — what authority, on whose authority. Reply, sir. Explain. Answer why."

Permit the landlord humbly to submit to Monsieur the Courier, then, that Monseigneur, ordinarily so gracious, enraged himself without cause. There was no why. Monsieur the Courier would represent to Monseigneur that he deceived himself in suspecting that there was any why, but the why his devoted servant had already had the honor to present to him. The very genteel lady —

"Silence!" cried Mr. Dorrit. "Hold your tongue! I will hear no more of the very genteel lady; I will hear no more of you. Look at this family — my family — a family more genteel than any lady. You have treated this family with disrespect; you have been insolent to this family. I'll ruin you. Ha — send for the horses, pack the carriages; I'll not set foot in this man's house again!"

No one had interfered in the dispute, which was beyond the French colloquial powers of Edward Dorrit, Esquire, and scarcely within the province

of the ladies. Miss Fanny, however, now supported her father with great bitterness; declaring, in her native tongue, that it was quite clear there was something special in this man's impertinence; and that she considered it important that he should be, by some means, forced to give up his authority for making distinctions between that family and other wealthy families. What the reasons of his presumption could be, she was at a loss to imagine; but reasons he must have, and they ought to be torn from him.

All the guides, mule-drivers, and idlers in the yard had made themselves parties to the angry conference, and were much impressed by the courier's now bestirring himself to get the carriages out. With the aid of some dozen people to each wheel, this was done at a great cost of noise; and then the loading was proceeded with, pending the arrival of the horses from the post-house.

But, the very genteel lady's English chariot being already horsed and at the inn door, the landlord had slipped up-stairs to represent his hard case. This was notified to the yard by his now coming down the staircase in attendance on the gentleman and the lady, and by his pointing out the offended majesty of Mr. Dorrit to them with a significant motion of his hand.

"Beg your pardon," said the gentleman, detaching himself from the lady, and coming forward. "I am a man of few words, and a bad hand at an explanation — but lady here is extremely anxious that there should be no Row. Lady — a mother of mine, in point of fact — wishes me to say that she hopes no Row."

Mr. Dorrit, still panting under his injury, saluted the gentleman, and saluted the lady, in a distant, final, and invincible manner.

"No, but really — here, old feller; you!" This was the gentleman's way of appealing to Edward Dorrit, Esquire, on whom he pounced as a great and providential relief. "Let you and I try to make this all right. Lady so very much wishes no Row."

Edward Dorrit, Esquire, led a little apart by the button, assumed a diplomatic expression of countenance in replying, "Why, you must confess that when you bespeak a lot of rooms beforehand, and they belong to you, it's not pleasant to find other people in 'em."

"No," said the other, "I know it isn't. I admit it. Still, let you and I try to make it all right, and avoid Row. The fault is not this chap's at all, but my mother's. Being a remarkably fine woman with no biggodd nonsense about her — well educated, too — she was too many for this chap. Regularly pocketed him."

"If that's the case" — Edward Dorrit, Esquire, began.

"Assure you 'pon my soul 'tis the case. Consequently," said the other gentleman, retiring on his main position, "why Row?"

"Edmund," said the lady from the doorway, "I hope you have explained, or are explaining, to the satisfaction of this gentleman and his family, that the civil landlord is not to blame."

"Assure you, ma'am," returned Edmund, "perfectly paralyzing myself with trying it on." He then looked steadfastly at Edward Dorrit, Esquire,

for some seconds, and suddenly added, in a burst of confidence, "Old feller! *Is* it all right?"

"I don't know, after all," said the lady, gracefully advancing a step or two towards Mr. Dorrit, "but that I had better say myself, at once, that I assured this good man I took all the consequences on myself of occupying one of a stranger's suite of rooms, during his absence, for just as much (or as little) time as I could dine in. I had no idea the rightful owner would come back so soon, nor had I any idea that he had come back, or I should have hastened to make restoration of my ill-gotten chamber, and to have offered my explanation and apology. I trust, in saying this" —

For a moment the lady, with a glass at her eye, stood transfixed and speechless before the two Miss Dorrits. At the same moment, Miss Fanny, in the foreground of a grand pictorial composition, formed by the family, the family equipages, and the family servants, held her sister tight under one arm to detain her on the spot, and with the other arm fanned herself with a distinguished air, and negligently surveyed the lady from head to foot.

The lady, recovering herself quickly — for it was Mrs. Merdle, and she was not easily dashed — went on to add that she trusted, in saying this, she apologized for her boldness, and restored this well-behaved landlord to the favor that was so very valuable to him. Mr. Dorrit, on the altar of whose dignity all this was incense, made a gracious reply; and said that his people should — ha — countermand his horses, and he would — hum — overlook what he had at first supposed to be an affront, but now regarded as an honor. Upon this the bosom bent

to him; and its owner, with a wonderful command of feature, addressed a winning smile of adieu to the two sisters, as young ladies of fortune in whose favor she was much prepossessed, and whom she had never had the gratification of seeing before.

Not so, however, Mr. Sparkler. This gentleman, becoming transfixed at the same moment as his lady mother, could not by any means unfix himself again, but stood stiffly staring at the whole composition, with Miss Fanny in the foreground. On his mother's saying, "Edmund, we are quite ready; will you give me your arm?" he seemed, by the motion of his lips, to reply with some remark comprehending the form of words in which his shining talents found the most frequent utterance, but he relaxed no muscle. So fixed was his figure, that it would have been matter of some difficulty to bend him sufficiently to get him in the carriage door, if he had not received the timely assistance of a maternal pull from within. He was no sooner within than the pad of the little window in the back of the chariot disappeared, and his eye usurped its place. There it remained as long as so small an object was discernible, and probably much longer, staring (as though something inexpressibly surprising should happen to a codfish) like an ill-executed eye in a large locket.

This encounter was so highly agreeable to Miss Fanny, and gave her so much to think of with triumph afterwards, that it softened her asperities exceedingly. When the procession was again in motion next day, she occupied her place in it with a new gayety; and showed such a flow of spirits, indeed, that Mrs. General looked rather surprised.

Little Dorrit was glad to be found no fault with, and to see that Fanny was pleased; but her part in the procession was a musing part, and a quiet one. Sitting opposite her father in the travelling carriage, and recalling the old Marshalsea room, her present existence was a dream. All that she saw was new and wonderful, but it was not real; it seemed to her as if those visions of mountains and picturesque countries might melt away at any moment, and the carriage, turning some abrupt corner, bring it with a jolt at the old Marshalsea gate.

To have no work to do was strange, but not half so strange as having glided into a corner where she had no one to think for, nothing to plan and contrive, no cares of others to load herself with. Strange as that was, it was far stranger yet to find a space between herself and her father, where others occupied themselves in taking care of him, and where she was never expected to be. At first, this was so much more unlike her old experience than even the mountains themselves, that she had been unable to resign herself to it, and had tried to retain her old place about him. But he had spoken to her alone, and had said that people — ha — people in an exalted position, my dear, must scrupulously exact respect from their dependents; and that for her, his daughter, Miss Amy Dorrit, of the sole remaining branch of the Dorrits of Dorsetshire, to be known to — hum — to occupy herself in fulfilling the functions of — ha, hum — a valet, would be incompatible with that respect. Therefore, my dear, he — ha — he laid his parental injunctions upon her to remember that she was a lady, who had now to conduct herself with — hum — a proper pride,

and to preserve the rank of a lady; and consequently he requested her to abstain from doing what would occasion — ha — unpleasant and derogatory remarks. She had obeyed without a murmur. Thus it had been brought about that she now sat in her corner of the luxurious carriage with her little patient hands folded before her, quite displaced even from the last point of the old standing-ground in life on which her feet had lingered.

It was from this position that all she saw appeared unreal; the more surprising the scenes, the more they resembled the unreality of her own inner life as she went through its vacant places all day long. The gorges of the Simplon, its enormous depths and thundering waterfalls, the wonderful road, the points of danger where a loose wheel or a faltering horse would have been destruction, the descent into Italy, the opening of that beautiful land, as the rugged mountain-chasm widened and let them out from a gloomy and dark imprisonment — all a dream — only the old mean Marshalsea a reality. Nay, even the old mean Marshalsea was shaken to its foundations when she pictured it without her father. She could scarcely believe that the prisoners were still lingering in the close yard, that the mean rooms were still every one tenanted, and that the turnkey still stood in the lodge letting people in and out, all just as she well knew it to be.

With a remembrance of her father's old life in prison hanging about her like the burden of a sorrowful tune, Little Dorrit would wake from a dream of her birthplace into a whole day's dream. The painted room in which she awoke, often a humbled state chamber in a dilapidated palace, would begin

it; with its wild red autumnal vine-leaves overhanging the glass, its orange-trees on the cracked white terrace outside the window, a group of monks and peasants in the little street below, misery and magnificence wrestling with each other upon every rood of ground in the prospect, no matter how widely diversified, and misery throwing magnificence with the strength of fate. To this would succeed a labyrinth of bare passages and pillared galleries, with the family procession already preparing in the quadrangle below, through the carriages and luggage being brought together by the servants for the day's journey. Then, breakfast in another painted chamber, damp-stained and of desolate proportions; and then the departure, which, to her timidity and sense of not being grand enough for her place in the ceremonies, was always an uneasy thing. For, then the courier (who himself would have been a foreign gentleman of high mark in the Marshalsea) would present himself to report that all was ready; and then her father's valet would pompously induct him into his travelling cloak; and then Fanny's maid, and her own maid (who was a weight on Little Dorrit's mind — absolutely made her cry at first, she knew so little what to do with her), would be in attendance; and then her brother's man would complete his master's equipment; and then her father would give his arm to Mrs. General, and her uncle would give his to her, and, escorted by the landlord and inn servants, they would swoop down-stairs. There, a crowd would be collected to see them enter their carriages, which, amidst much bowing, and begging, and prancing, and lashing, and clattering, they would do; and so they would be driven madly

through the narrow unsavory streets, and jerked out of the town gate.

Among the day's unrealities would be, roads where the bright red vines were looped and garlanded together on trees for many miles; woods of olives; white villages and towns on hill-sides, lovely without, but frightful in their dirt and poverty within; crosses by the way; deep blue lakes with fairy islands, and clustering boats with awnings of bright colors and sails of beautiful forms; vast piles of building mouldering to dust; hanging gardens where the weeds had grown so strong that their stems, like wedges driven home, had split the arch and rent the wall; stone-terraced lanes, with the lizards running into and out of every chink; beggars of all sorts everywhere; pitiful, picturesque, hungry, merry: children beggars and aged beggars. Often at posting-houses, and other halting-places, these miserable creatures would appear to her the only realities of the day; and many a time, when the money she had brought to give them was all given away, she would sit with her folded hands, thoughtfully looking after some diminutive girl leading her gray father, as if the sight reminded her of something in the days that were gone.

Again, there would be places where they stayed the week together in splendid rooms, had banquets every day, rode out among heaps of wonders, walked through miles of palaces, and rested in dark corners of great churches; where there were winking lamps of gold and silver among pillars and arches, kneeling figures dotted about at confessionals and on the pavements; where there was the mist and scent of incense; where there were pictures, fantastic images,

gaudy altars, great heights and distances, all softly lighted through stained glass, and the massive curtains that hung in the doorways. From these cities they would go on again, by the roads of vines and olives, through squalid villages where there was not a hovel without a gap in its filthy walls, not a window with a whole inch of glass or paper; where there seemed to be nothing to support life, nothing to eat, nothing to make, nothing to grow, nothing to hope, nothing to do but die.

Again, they would come to whole towns of palaces, whose proper inmates were all banished, and which were all changed into barracks: troops of idle soldiers leaning out of the state windows, where their accoutrements hung drying on the marble architecture, and showing to the mind like hosts of rats who were (happily) eating away the props of the edifices that supported them, and must soon, with them, be smashed on the heads of the other swarms of soldiers, and the swarms of priests, and the swarms of spies, who were all the ill-looking population left to be ruined, in the streets below.

Through such scenes the family procession moved on to Venice. And here it dispersed for a time, as they were to live in Venice some few months, in a palace (itself six times as big as the whole Marshalsea) on the Grand Canal.

In this crowning unreality, where all the streets were paved with water, and where the death-like stillness of the days and nights was broken by no sound but the softened ringing of church bells, the rippling of the current, and the cry of the gondoliers turning the corners of the flowing streets, Little Dorrit, quite lost by her task being done, sat

down to muse. The family began a gay life, went here and there, and turned night into day; but, she was timid of joining in their gayeties, and only asked leave to be left alone.

Sometimes she would step into one of the gondolas that were always kept in waiting, moored to painted posts at the door — when she could escape from the attendance of that oppressive maid, who was her mistress, and a very hard one — and would be taken all over the strange city. Social people in other gondolas began to ask each other who the little solitary girl was whom they passed, sitting in her boat with folded hands, looking so pensively and wonderingly about her. Never thinking that it would be worth anybody's while to notice her or her doings, Little Dorrit, in her quiet, scared, lost manner, went about the city none the less.

But, her favorite station was the balcony of her own room, overhanging the canal, with other balconies below, and none above. It was of massive stone, darkened by ages, built in a wild fancy which came from the East to that collection of wild fancies; and Little Dorrit was little indeed, leaning on the broad-cushioned ledge, and looking over. As she liked no place of an evening half so well, she soon began to be watched for, and many eyes in passing gondolas were raised, and many people said, There was the little figure of the English girl who was always alone.

Such people were not realities to the little figure of the English girl; such people were all unknown to her. She would watch the sunset, in its long low lines of purple and red, and its burning flush high up into the sky: so glowing on the buildings, and

so lightening their structure, that it made them look as if their strong walls were transparent, and they shone from within. She would watch those glories expire; and then, after looking at the black gondolas underneath, taking guests to music and dancing, would raise her eyes to the shining stars. Was there no party of her own, in other times, on which the stars had shone? To think of that old gate now!

She would think of that old gate, and of herself sitting at it in the dead of the night, pillowing Maggy's head; and of other places and of other scenes associated with those different times. And then she would lean upon her balcony, and look over at the water, as though they all lay underneath it. When she got to that, she would musingly watch its running, as if, in the general vision, it might run dry, and show her the prison again, and herself, and the old room, and the old inmates, and the old visitors: all lasting realities that had never changed.

CHAPTER IV.

A LETTER FROM LITTLE DORRIT.

DEAR MR. CLENNAM, — I write to you from my own room at Venice, thinking you will be glad to hear from me. But I know you cannot be so glad to hear from me as I am to write to you; for everything about you is as you have been accustomed to see it, and you miss nothing — unless it should be me, which can only be for a very little while together and very seldom — while everything in my life is so strange, and I miss so much.

When we were in Switzerland, which appears to have been years ago, though it was only weeks, I met young Mrs. Gowan, who was on a mountain excursion like ourselves. She told me she was very well and very happy. She sent you the message, by me, that she thanked you affectionately, and would never forget you. She was quite confiding with me, and I loved her almost as soon as I spoke to her. But there is nothing singular in that; who could help loving so beautiful and winning a creature? I could not wonder at any one loving her. No, indeed.

It will not make you uneasy on Mrs. Gowan's account, I hope — for I remember that you said you

had the interest of a true friend in her — if I tell you that I wish she could have married some one better suited to her. Mr. Gowan seems fond of her, and of course she is very fond of him, but I thought he was not earnest enough — I don't mean in that respect — I mean in anything. I could not keep it out of my mind that if I was Mrs. Gowan (what a change that would be, and how I must alter to become like her!) I should feel that I was rather lonely and lost, or the want of some one who was steadfast and firm in purpose. I even thought she felt this want a little, almost without knowing it. But mind you are not made uneasy by this, for she was "very well and very happy." And she looked most beautiful.

I expect to meet her again before long, and, indeed, have been expecting for some days past to see her here. I will ever be as good a friend to her as I can for your sake. Dear Mr. Clennam, I dare say you think little of having been a friend to me when I had made no other (not that I have any other now, for I have no new friends), but I think much of it, and I never can forget it.

I wish I knew — but it is best for no one to write to me — how Mr. and Mrs. Plornish prosper in the business which my dear father bought for them, and that old Mr. Nandy lives happily with them and his two grandchildren, and sings all his songs over and over again. I cannot quite keep back the tears from my eyes when I think of my poor Maggy, and of the blank she must have felt at first, however kind they all are to her, without her Little Mother. Will you go and tell her, as a strict secret, with my love, that she never can have regretted our separation more than I have regretted it? And will you

tell them all that I have thought of them every day, and that my heart is faithful to them everywhere? Oh, if you could know how faithful, you would almost pity me for being so far away and being so grand!

You will be glad, I am sure, to know that my dear father is very well in health, and that all these changes are highly beneficial to him, and that he is very different indeed from what he used to be when you used to see him. There is an improvement in my uncle too, I think, though he never complained of old, and never exults now. Fanny is very graceful, quick, and clever. It is natural to her to be a lady; she has adapted herself to our new fortunes with wonderful ease. This reminds me that I have not been able to do so, and that I sometimes almost despair of ever being able to do so. I find that I cannot learn. Mrs. General is always with us, and we speak French and speak Italian, and she takes pains to form us in many ways. When I say we speak French and Italian, I mean they do. As for me, I am so slow that I scarcely get on at all. As soon as I begin to plan, and think, and try, all my planning, thinking, and trying go in old directions, and I begin to feel careful again about the expenses of the day, and about my dear father, and about my work, and then I remember with a start that there are no such cares left, and that in itself is so new and improbable that it sets me wandering again. I should not have the courage to mention this to any one but you.

It is the same with all these new countries and wonderful sights. They are very beautiful, and they astonish me, but I am not collected enough—

not familiar enough with myself, if you can quite understand what I mean — to have all the pleasure in them that I might have. What I knew before them blends with them, too, so curiously. For instance, when we were among the mountains, I often felt (I hesitate to tell such an idle thing, dear Mr. Clennam, even to you) as if the Marshalsea must be behind that great rock; or as if Mrs. Clennam's room where I have worked so many days, and where I first saw you, must be just beyond that snow. Do you remember one night when I came with Maggy to your lodging in Covent Garden? That room I have often and often fancied I have seen before me, travelling along for miles by the side of our carriage, when I have looked out of the carriage window after dark. We were shut out that night, and sat at the iron gate, and walked about till morning. I often look up at the stars, even from the balcony of this room, and believe that I am in the street again shut out with Maggy. It is the same with people that I left in England.

When I go about here in a gondola, I surprise myself looking into other gondolas as if I hoped to see them. It would overcome me with joy to see them, but I don't think it would surprise me much at first. In my fanciful times I fancy that they might be anywhere; and I almost expect to see their dear faces on the bridges or the quays.

Another difficulty that I have will seem very strange to you. It must seem very strange to any one but me, and does even to me: I often feel the old sad pity for — I need not write the word — for him. Changed as he is, and inexpressibly blessed and thankful as I always am to know it, the old

sorrowful feeling of compassion comes upon me sometimes with such strength, that I want to put my arms round his neck, tell him how I love him, and cry a little on his breast. I should be glad after that, and proud and happy. But I know that I must not do this; that he would not like it, that Fanny would be angry, that Mrs. General would be amazed; and so I quiet myself. Yet, in doing so, I struggle with the feeling that I have come to be at a distance from him; and that, even in the midst of all the servants and attendants, he is deserted, and in want of me.

Dear Mr. Clennam, I have written a great deal ut myself, but I must write a little more still, or what I wanted most of all to say in this weak letter would be left out of it. In all these foolish ghts of mine, which I have been so hardy as to onfess to you because I know you will understand me if anybody can, and will make more allowance for me than anybody else would if you cannot — in all these thoughts there is one thought scarcely ever — never — out of my memory, and that is that I hope you sometimes, in a quiet moment, have a thought for me. I must tell you that, as to this, I have felt, ever since I have been away, an anxiety which I am very, very anxious to relieve. I have been afraid that you may think of me in a new light, or a new character. Don't do that; I could not bear that — it would make me more unhappy than you can suppose. It would break my heart to believe that you thought of me in any way that would make me stranger to you than I was when you were so good to me. What I have to pray and entreat of you is, that you will never think of me

as the daughter of a rich person; that you will never think of me as dressing any better, or living any better, than when you first knew me. That you will remember me only as the little shabby girl you protected with so much tenderness, from whose threadbare dress you have kept away the rain, and whose wet feet you have dried at your fire. That you will think of me (when you think of me at all), and of my true affection and devoted gratitude, always without change, as of

Your poor child,

LITTLE DORRIT.

P. S. — Particularly remember that you are not to be uneasy about Mrs. Gowan. Her words were, "Very well and very happy." And she looked most beautiful.

CHAPTER V.

SOMETHING WRONG SOMEWHERE.

THE family had been a month or two at Venice, when Mr. Dorrit, who was much among Counts and Marquises, and had but scant leisure, set an hour of one day apart, beforehand, for the purpose of holding some conference with Mrs. General.

The time he had reserved in his mind arriving, he sent Mr. Tinkler, his valet, to Mrs. General's apartment (which would have absorbed about a third of the area of the Marshalsea), to present his compliments to that lady, and represent him as desiring the favor of an interview. It being that period of the forenoon when the various members of the family had coffee in their own chambers, some couple of hours before assembling at breakfast in a faded hall which had once been sumptuous, but was now the prey of watery vapors and a settled melancholy, Mrs. General was accessible to the valet. That envoy found her on a little square of carpet, so extremely diminutive in reference to the size of her stone and marble floor, that she looked as if she might have had it spread for the trying on of a ready-made pair of shoes; or as if she had come into possession of the enchanted piece of carpet, bought

for forty purses by one of the three princes in the Arabian Nights, and had that moment been transported on it, at a wish, into a palatial saloon with which it had no connection.

Mrs. General replying to the envoy, as she set down her empty coffee-cup, that she was willing at once to proceed to Mr. Dorrit's apartment, and spare him the trouble of coming to her (which, in his gallantry, he had proposed), the envoy threw open the door, and escorted Mrs. General to the presence. It was quite a walk, by mysterious staircases and corridors, from Mrs. General's apartment — hoodwinked by a narrow side-street with a low gloomy bridge in it, and dungeon-like opposite tenements, their walls besmeared with a thousand downward stains and streaks, as if every crazy aperture in them had been weeping tears of rust into the Adriatic for centuries — to Mr. Dorrit's apartment: with a whole English house-front of window, a prospect of beautiful church domes rising into the blue sky sheer out of the water which reflected them, and a hushed murmur of the Grand Canal laving the doorways below, where his gondolas and gondoliers attended his pleasure, drowsily swinging in a little forest of piles.

Mr. Dorrit, in a resplendent dressing-gown and cap — the dormant grub that had so long bided its time among the collegians had burst into a rare butterfly — rose to receive Mrs. General. A chair to Mrs. General. An easier chair, sir; what are you doing, what are you about, what do you mean? Now leave us!

"Mrs. General," said Mr. Dorrit, "I took the liberty" —

"By no means," Mrs. General interposed. "I was quite at your disposition. I had had my coffee."

"I took the liberty," said Mr. Dorrit again, with the magnificent placidity of one who was above correction, "to solicit the favor of a little private conversation with you, because I feel rather worried respecting my — ha — my younger daughter. You will have observed a great difference of temperament, madam, between my two daughters?"

Said Mrs. General in response, crossing her gloved hands (she was never without gloves, and they never creased and always fitted), "There is a great difference."

"May I ask to be favored with your view of it?" said Mr. Dorrit with a deference not incompatible with majestic serenity.

"Fanny," returned Mrs. General, "has force of character and self-reliance. Amy, none."

None? Oh, Mrs. General, ask the Marshalsea stones and bars! Oh, Mrs. General, ask the milliner who taught her to work, and the dancing-master who taught her sister to dance! Oh, Mrs. General, Mrs. General, ask me, her father, what I owe to her; and hear my testimony touching the life of this slighted little creature, from her childhood up!

No such adjuration entered Mr. Dorrit's head. He looked at Mrs. General, seated in her usual erect attitude on her coach-box behind the proprieties, and he said, in a thoughtful manner, "True, madam."

"I would not," said Mrs. General, "be understood to say, observe, that there is nothing to improve in Fanny. But there is material there — perhaps, indeed, a little too much."

"Will you be kind enough, madam," said Mr.

Dorrit, "to be — ha — more explicit? I do not quite understand my elder daughter's having — hum — too much material. What material?"

"Fanny," returned Mrs. General, "at present forms too many opinions. Perfect breeding forms none, and is never demonstrative."

Lest he himself should be found deficient in perfect breeding, Mr. Dorrit hastened to reply, "Unquestionably, madam, you are right." Mrs. General returned, in her emotionless and expressionless manner, "I believe so."

"But you are aware, my dear madam," said Mr. Dorrit, "that my daughters had the misfortune to lose their lamented mother when they were very young; and that, in consequence of my not having been until lately the recognized heir to my property, they have lived with me as a comparatively poor, though always proud, gentleman, in — ha, hum — retirement!"

"I do not," said Mrs. General, "lose sight of the circumstance."

"Madam," pursued Mr. Dorrit, "of my daughter Fanny, under her present guidance, and with such an example constantly before her" —

(Mrs. General shut her eyes.)

"— I have no misgivings. There is adaptability of character in Fanny. But my younger daughter, Mrs. General, rather worries and vexes my thoughts. I must inform you that she has always been my favorite."

"There is no accounting," said Mrs. General, "for these partialities."

"Ha — no," assented Mr. Dorrit. "No. Now, madam, I am troubled by noticing that Amy is not,

so to speak, one of ourselves. She does not care to go about with us; she is lost in the society we have here; our tastes are evidently not her tastes. Which," said Mr. Dorrit, summing up with judicial gravity, "is to say, in other words, that there is something wrong in — ha — Amy."

"May we incline to the supposition," said Mrs. General with a little touch of varnish, "that something is referable to the novelty of the position?"

"Excuse me, madam," observed Mr. Dorrit rather quickly. "The daughter of a gentleman, though — ha — himself at one time comparatively far from affluent — comparatively — and herself reared in — hum — retirement, need not of necessity find this position so very novel."

"True," said Mrs. General, "true."

"Therefore, madam," said Mr. Dorrit, "I took the liberty" (he laid an emphasis on the phrase, and repeated it, as though he stipulated, with urbane firmness, that he must not be contradicted again), "I took the liberty of requesting this interview, in order that I might mention the topic to you, and inquire how you would advise me?"

"Mr. Dorrit," returned Mrs. General, "I have conversed with Amy several times, since we have been residing here, on the general subject of the formation of a demeanor. She has expressed herself to me as wondering exceedingly at Venice. I have mentioned to her that it is better not to wonder. I have pointed out to her that the celebrated Mr. Eustace, the classical tourist, did not think much of it; and that he compared the Rialto, greatly to its disadvantage, with Westminster and Blackfriars Bridges. I need not add, after what you have

said, that I have not yet found my arguments successful. You do me the honor to ask me what I advise. It always appears to me (if this should prove to be a baseless assumption, I shall be pardoned), that Mr. Dorrit has been accustomed to exercise influence over the minds of others."

"Hum — madam," said Mr. Dorrit, "I have been at the head of — ha — of a considerable community. You are right in supposing that I am not unaccustomed to — an influential position."

"I am happy," returned Mrs. General, "to be so corroborated. I would, therefore, the more confidently recommend that Mr. Dorrit should speak to Amy himself, and make his observations and wishes known to her. Being his favorite besides, and no doubt attached to him, she is all the more likely to yield to his influence."

"I had anticipated your suggestion, madam," said Mr. Dorrit, "but — ha — was not sure that I might — hum — not encroach on" —

"On my province, Mr. Dorrit?" said Mrs. General graciously. "Do not mention it."

"Then, with your leave, madam," resumed Mr. Dorrit, ringing his little bell to summon his valet, "I will send for her at once."

"Does Mr. Dorrit wish me to remain?"

"Perhaps, if you have no other engagement, you would not object for a minute or two" —

"Not at all."

So, Tinkler the valet was instructed to find Miss Amy's maid, and to request that subordinate to inform Miss Amy that Mr. Dorrit wished to see her in his own room. In delivering this charge to Tinkler, Mr. Dorrit looked severely at him, and also

kept a jealous eye upon him until he went out at the door, mistrusting that he might have something in his mind prejudicial to the family dignity; that he might have even got wind of some collegiate joke before he came into the service, and might be derisively reviving its remembrance at the present moment. If Tinkler had happened to smile, however faintly and innocently, nothing would have persuaded Mr. Dorrit, to the hour of his death, but that this was the case. As Tinkler happened, however, very fortunately for himself, to be of a serious and composed countenance, he escaped the secret danger that threatened him. And as on his return — when Mr. Dorrit eyed him again — he announced Miss Amy as if she had come to a funeral, he left a vague impression on Mr. Dorrit's mind that he was a well-conducted young fellow, who had been brought up in the study of his catechism by a widowed mother.

"Amy," said Mr. Dorrit, "you have just now been the subject of some conversation between myself and Mrs. General. We agree that you scarcely seem at home here. Ha — how is this?"

A pause.

"I think, father, I require a little time."

"Papa is a preferable mode of address," observed Mrs. General. "Father is rather vulgar, my dear. The word Papa, besides, gives a pretty form to the lips. Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes, and prism are all very good words for the lips: especially prunes and prism. You will find it serviceable, in the formation of a demeanor, if you sometimes say to yourself in company — on entering a room, for instance — Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prism, prunes and prism."

"Pray, my child," said Mr. Dorrit, "attend to the — hum — precepts of Mrs. General."

Poor Little Dorrit, with a rather forlorn glance at that eminent varnisher, promised to try.

"You say, Amy," pursued Mr. Dorrit, "that you think you require time. Time for what?"

Another pause.

"To become accustomed to the novelty of my life was all I meant," said Little Dorrit, with her loving eyes upon her father; whom she had very nearly addressed as poultry, if not prunes and prism too, in her desire to submit herself to Mrs. General and please him.

Mr. Dorrit frowned, and looked anything but pleased. "Amy," he returned, "it appears to me, I must say, that you have had abundance of time for that. Ha — you surprise me. You disappoint me. Fanny has conquered any such little difficulties, and — hum — why not you?"

"I hope I shall do better soon," said Little Dorrit.

"I hope so," returned her father. "I — ha — I most devoutly hope so, Amy. I sent for you in order that I might say — hum — impressively say, in the presence of Mrs. General, to whom we are all so much indebted for obligingly being present among us on — ha — on this or any other occasion," Mrs. General shut her eyes, "that I — ha, hum — am not pleased with you. You make Mrs. General's a thankless task. You — ha — embarrass me very much. You have always (as I have informed Mrs. General) been my favorite child; I have always made you a — hum — a friend and companion; in return, I beg — I — ha — I *do* beg that you

accommodate yourself better to — hum — circumstances, and dutifully do what becomes your — your station."

Mr. Dorrit was even a little more fragmentary than usual; being excited on the subject, and anxious to make himself particularly emphatic.

"I do beg," he repeated, "that this may be attended to, and that you will seriously take pains and try to conduct yourself in a manner both becoming your position as — ha — Miss Amy Dorrit, and satisfactory to myself and Mrs. General."

That lady shut her eyes again on being again referred to; then, slowly opening them and rising, added these words: —

"If Miss Amy Dorrit will direct her own attention to, and will accept of my poor assistance in, the formation of a surface, Mr. Dorrit will have no further cause of anxiety. May I take this opportunity of remarking, as an instance in point, that it is scarcely delicate to look at vagrants with the attention which I have seen bestowed upon them by a very dear young friend of mine? They should not be looked at. Nothing disagreeable should ever be looked at. Apart from such a habit standing in the way of that graceful equanimity of surface which is so expressive of good-breeding, it hardly seems compatible with refinement of mind. A truly refined mind will seem to be ignorant of the existence of anything that is not perfectly proper, placid, and pleasant." Having delivered this exalted sentiment, Mrs. General made a sweeping obeisance, and retired with an expression of mouth indicative of Prunes and Prism.

Little Dorrit, whether speaking or silent, had

preserved her quiet earnestness and her loving look. It had not been clouded, except for a passing moment, until now. But, now that she was left alone with him, the fingers of her lightly folded hands were agitated, and there was repressed emotion in her face.

Not for herself. She might feel a little wounded, but her care was not for herself. Her thoughts still turned, as they always had turned, to him. A faint misgiving, which had hung about her since their accession to fortune, that even now she could never see him as he used to be before the prison days, had gradually begun to assume form in her mind. She felt that, in what he had just now said to her, and in his whole bearing towards her, there was the well-known shadow of the Marshalsea wall. It took a new shape, but it was the old sad shadow. She began, with sorrowful unwillingness, to acknowledge to herself that she was not strong enough to keep off the fear that no space in the life of man could overcome that quarter of a century behind the prison bars. She had no blame to bestow upon him, therefore: nothing to reproach him with, no emotions in her faithful heart but great compassion and unbounded tenderness.

This is why it was that, even as he sat before her on his sofa, in the brilliant light of a bright Italian day, the wonderful city without and the splendors of an old palace within, she saw him at the moment in the long-familiar gloom of his Marshalsea lodging, and wished to take her seat beside him, and comfort him, and be again full of confidence with him, and of usefulness to him. If he divined what was in her thoughts, his own were not in tune with

it. After some uneasy moving in his seat, he got up, and walked about, looking very much dissatisfied.

"Is there anything else you wish to say to me, dear father?"

"No, no. Nothing else."

"I am sorry you have not been pleased with me, dear. I hope you will not think of me with displeasure now. I am going to try, more than ever, to adapt myself as you wish to what surrounds me — for indeed I have tried all along, though I have failed, I know."

"Amy!" he returned, turning short upon her. "You — ha — habitually hurt me."

"Hurt you, father! I!"

"There is a — hum — a topic," said Mr. Dorrit, looking all about the ceiling of the room, and never at the attentive, uncomplainingly shocked face, "a painful topic, a series of events which I wish — ha — altogether to obliterate. This is understood by your sister, who has already remonstrated with you in my presence; it is understood by your brother; it is understood by — ha, hum — by every one of delicacy and sensitiveness, except yourself — ha — I am sorry to say, except yourself. You, Amy — hum — you alone, and only you — constantly revive the topic, though not in words."

She laid her hand on his arm. She did nothing more. She gently touched him. The trembling hand may have said, with some expression, "Think of me, think how I have worked, think of my many cares!" But, she said not a syllable herself.

There was a reproach in the touch so addressed to

him that she had not foreseen, or she would have withheld her hand. He began to justify himself; in a heated, stumbling, angry manner, which made nothing of it.

"I was there all those years. I was — ha — universally acknowledged as the head of the place. I — hum — I caused you to be respected there, Amy. I — ha, hum — I gave my family a position there. I deserve a return. I claim a return. I say, sweep it off the face of the earth, and begin afresh. Is that much? I ask, is *that* much?"

He did not at once look at her as he rambled on in this way; but gesticulated at, and appealed to, the empty air.

"I have suffered. Probably I know how much I have suffered, better than any one — ha — I say than any one! If *I* can put that aside, if *I* can eradicate the marks of what I have endured, and can emerge before the world a — ha — gentleman unspoiled, unspotted — is it a great deal to expect — I say again, is it a great deal to expect — that my children should — hum — do the same, and sweep that accursed experience off the face of the earth?"

In spite of his flustered state, he made all these exclamations in a carefully suppressed voice, lest the valet should overhear anything.

"Accordingly, they do it. Your sister does it. Your brother does it. You alone, my favorite child, whom I made the friend and companion of my life when you were a mere — hum — Baby, do not do it. You alone say you can't do it. I provide you with valuable assistance to do it. I attach an accomplished and highly-bred lady — ha — Mrs. General, to you, for the purpose of doing it. Is it surprising

that I should be displeased? Is it necessary that I should defend myself for expressing my displeasure? No!"

Notwithstanding which, he continued to defend himself, without any abatement of his flushed mood.

"I am careful to appeal to that lady for confirmation, before I express any displeasure at all. I — hum — I necessarily make that appeal within limited bounds, or I — ha — should render legible, by that lady, what I desire to be blotted out. Am I selfish? Do I complain for my own sake? No. No. Principally for — ha, hum — your sake, Amy."

This last consideration plainly appeared, from his manner of pursuing it, to have just that instant come into his head.

"I said I was hurt. So I am. So I — ha — am determined to be, whatever is advanced to the contrary. I am hurt that my daughter, seated in the — hum — lap of fortune, should mope and retire, and proclaim herself unequal to her destiny. I am hurt that she should — ha — systematically reproduce what the rest of us blot out; and seem — hum — I had almost said positively anxious — to announce to wealthy and distinguished society that she was born and bred in — ha, hum — a place that I, myself, decline to name. But there is no inconsistency — ha — not the least, in my feeling hurt, and yet complaining principally for your sake, Amy. I do; I say again, I do. It is for your sake that I wish you, under the auspices of Mrs. General, to form a — hum — a surface. It is for your sake that I wish you to have a — ha — truly refined mind, and (in the striking words of Mrs. General) to be

ignorant of everything that is not perfectly proper, placid, and pleasant."

He had been running down by jerks during his last speech, like a sort of ill-adjusted alarum. The touch was still upon his arm. He fell silent; and, after looking about the ceiling again for a little while, looked down at her. Her head drooped, and he could not see her face; but her touch was tender and quiet, and in the expression of her dejected figure there was no blame — nothing but love. He began to whimper, just as he had done that night in the prison when she afterwards sat at his bedside till morning; exclaimed that he was a poor ruin and a poor wretch in the midst of his wealth; and clasped her in his arms. "Hush, hush, my own dear! Kiss me!" was all she said to him. His tears were soon dried, much sooner than on the former occasion; and he was presently afterwards very high with his valet, as a way of righting himself for having shed any.

With one remarkable exception, to be recorded in its place, this was the only time, in his life of freedom and fortune, when he spoke to his daughter Amy of the old days.

But, now, the breakfast hour arrived; and with it Miss Fanny from her apartment, and Mr. Edward from his apartment. Both these young persons of distinction were something the worse for late hours. As to Miss Fanny, she had become the victim of an insatiate mania for what she called "going into society;" and would have gone into it head foremost fifty times between sunset and sunrise, if so many opportunities had been at her disposal. As to Mr. Edward, he, too, had a large

acquaintance, and was generally engaged (for the most part in dicing circles, or others of a kindred nature) during the greater part of every night. For, this gentleman, when his fortunes changed, had stood at the great advantage of being already prepared for the highest associates, and having little to learn: so much was he indebted to the happy accidents which had made him acquainted with horse-dealing and billiard-marking.

At breakfast Mr. Frederick Dorrit likewise appeared. As the old gentleman inhabited the highest story of the palace, where he might have practised pistol-shooting without much chance of discovery by the other inmates, his younger niece had taken courage to propose the restoration to him of his clarionet: which Mr. Dorrit had ordered to be confiscated, but which she had ventured to preserve. Notwithstanding some objections from Miss Fanny, that it was a low instrument, and that she detested the sound of it, the concession had been made. But, it was then discovered that he had had enough of it, and never played it, now that it was no longer his means of getting bread. He had insensibly acquired a new habit of shuffling into the picture-galleries, always with his twisted paper of snuff in his hand (much to the indignation of Miss Fanny, who had proposed the purchase of a gold box for him, that the family might not be discredited, which he had absolutely refused to carry when it was bought); and of passing hours and hours before the portraits of renowned Venetians. It was never made out what his dazed eyes saw in them: whether he had an interest in them merely as pictures, or whether he confusedly identified them

with a glory that was departed, like the strength of his own mind. But he paid his court to them with great exactness, and clearly derived pleasure from the pursuit. After the first few days, Little Dorrit happened one morning to assist at these attentions. It so evidently heightened his gratification, that she often accompanied him afterwards, and the greatest delight of which the old man had shown himself susceptible since his ruin arose out of these excursions, when he would carry a chair about for her from picture to picture, and stand behind it, in spite of all her remonstrances, silently presenting her to the noble Venetians.

It fell out that at this family breakfast he referred to their having seen in a gallery, on the previous day, the lady and gentleman whom they had encountered on the Great Saint Bernard. "I forget the name," said he. "I dare say you remember them, William? I dare say you do, Edward?"

"*I* remember 'em well enough," said the latter.

"I should think so," observed Miss Fanny with a toss of her head, and a glance at her sister. "But they would not have been recalled to our remembrance, I suspect, if uncle hadn't tumbled over the subject."

"My dear, what a curious phrase!" said Mrs. General. "Would not inadvertently lighted upon, or accidentally referred to, be better?"

"Thank you very much, Mrs. General," returned the young lady, "no, I think not. On the whole, I prefer my own expression."

This was always Miss Fanny's way of receiving a suggestion from Mrs. General. But, she always stored it up in her mind, and adopted it at another time.

"I should have mentioned our having met Mr. and Mrs. Gowan, Fanny," said Little Dorrit, "even if uncle had not. I have scarcely seen you since, you know. I meant to have spoken of it at breakfast; because I should like to pay a visit to Mrs. Gowan, and to become better acquainted with her, if papa and Mrs. General do not object."

"Well, Amy," said Fanny, "I am sure I am glad to find you, at last, expressing a wish to become better acquainted with anybody in Venice. Though whether Mr. and Mrs. Gowan are desirable acquaintances remains to be determined."

"Mrs. Gowan I spoke of, dear."

"No doubt," said Fanny. "But you can't separate her from her husband, I believe, without an Act of Parliament."

"Do you think, papa," inquired Little Dorrit with diffidence and hesitation, "there is any objection to my making this visit?"

"Really," he replied, "I — ha — what is Mrs. General's view?"

Mrs. General's view was, that, not having the honor of any acquaintance with the lady and gentleman referred to, she was not in a position to varnish the present article. She could only remark, as a general principle observed in the varnishing trade, that much depended on the quarter from which the lady under consideration was accredited, to a family so conspicuously niched in the social temple as the family of Dorrit.

At this remark the face of Mr. Dorrit gloomed considerably. He was about (connecting the accrediting with an obtrusive person of the name of Clennam, whom he imperfectly remembered in some

former state of existence) to black-ball the name of Gowan finally, when Edward Dorrit, Esquire, came into the conversation, with his glass in his eye, and the preliminary remark of "I say — you there! Go out, will you?" Which was addressed to a couple of men who were handing the dishes round, as a courteous intimation that their services could be temporarily dispensed with.

Those menials having obeyed the mandate, Edward Dorrit, Esquire, proceeded: —

"Perhaps it's a matter of policy to let you all know that these Gowans — in whose favor, or at least the gentleman's, I can't be supposed to be much prepossessed myself — are known to people of importance, if that makes any difference."

"That, I would say," observed the fair varnisher, "makes the greatest difference. The connection in question being really people of importance and consideration" —

"As to that," said Edward Dorrit, Esquire, "I'll give you the means of judging for yourself. You are acquainted, perhaps, with the famous name of Merdle?"

"The great Merdle!" exclaimed Mrs. General.

"*The* Merdle," said Edward Dorrit, Esquire. "They are known to him. Mrs. Gowan — I mean the dowager — my polite friend's mother — is intimate with Mrs. Merdle, and I know these two to be on their visiting-list."

"If so, a more undeniable guaranty could not be given," said Mrs. General to Mr. Dorrit, raising her gloves and bowing her head, as if she were doing homage to some visible graven image.

"I beg to ask my son, from motives of — ha —

curiosity," Mr. Dorrit observed, with a decided change in his manner, "how he becomes possessed of this — hum — timely information?"

"It's not a long story, sir," returned Edward Dorrit, Esquire, "and you shall have it out of hand. To begin with, Mrs. Merdle is the lady you had the parley with at what's-his-name place."

"Martigny," interposed Miss Fanny with an air of infinite languor.

"Martigny," assented her brother with a slight nod and a slight wink; in acknowledgment of which Miss Fanny looked surprised, and laughed and reddened.

"How can that be, Edward?" said Mr. Dorrit. "You informed me that the name of the gentleman with whom you conferred was — ha — Sparkler. Indeed, you showed me his card. Hum. Sparkler."

"No doubt of it, father; but it doesn't follow that his mother's name must be the same. Mrs. Merdle was married before, and he is her son. She is in Rome now; where probably we shall know more of her, as you decide to winter there. Sparkler is just come here. I passed last evening in company with Sparkler. Sparkler is a very good fellow on the whole, though rather a bore on one subject, in consequence of being tremendously smitten with a certain young lady." Here Edward Dorrit, Esquire, eyed Miss Fanny through his glass across the table. "We happened last night to compare notes about our travels, and I had the information I have given you from Sparkler himself." Here he ceased; continuing to eye Miss Fanny through his glass with a face much twisted, and not ornamentally so, in part by the action of keeping his glass in his eye, and in part by the great subtlety of his smile.

"Under these circumstances," said Mr. Dorrit, "I believe I express the sentiments of — ha — Mrs. General, no less than my own, when I say that there is no objection, but — ha, hum — quite the contrary — to your gratifying your desire, Amy. I trust I may — ha — hail — this desire," said Mr. Dorrit in an encouraging and forgiving manner, "as an auspicious omen. It is quite right to know these people. It is a very proper thing. Mr. Merdle's is a name of ha — world-wide repute. Mr. Merdle's undertakings are immense. They bring him in such vast sums of money, that they are regarded as — hum — national benefits. Mr. Merdle is the man of this time. The name of Merdle is the name of the age. Pray do everything on my behalf that is civil to Mr. and Mrs. Gowan, for we will — ha — we will certainly notice them."

This magnificent accordance of Mr. Dorrit's recognition settled the matter. It was not observed that uncle had pushed away his plate, and forgotten his breakfast; but he was not much observed at any time, except by Little Dorrit. The servants were recalled, and the meal proceeded to its conclusion. Mrs. General rose and left the table. Little Dorrit rose and left the table. When Edward and Fanny remained whispering together across it, and when Mr. Dorrit remained eating figs and reading a French newspaper, uncle suddenly fixed the attention of all three by rising out of his chair, striking his hand upon the table, and saying, "Brother, I protest against it!"

If he had made a proclamation in an unknown tongue, and given up the ghost immediately afterwards, he could not have astounded his audience

e. The paper fell from Mr. Dorrit's hand, and sat petrified, with a fig half-way to his mouth.

rother!" said the old man, conveying a sur- ng energy into his trembling voice, "I protest nst it! I love you; you know I love you dearly. these many years I have never been untrue to you a single thought. Weak as I am, I would at any have struck any man who spoke ill of you. brother, brother, brother, I protest against it!"

was extraordinary to see of what a burst of estness such a decrepit man was capable. His became bright, his gray hair rose on his head, tings of purpose on his brow and face, which faded from them for five and twenty years, started out again, and there was an energy in his d that made its action nervous once more.

"My dear Frederick!" exclaimed Mr. Dorrit faintly. "What is wrong? What is the matter?"

"How dare you," said the old man, turning round on Fanny, "how dare you do it? Have you no memory? Have you no heart?"

"Uncle!" cried Fanny, affrighted and bursting into tears, "why do you attack me in this cruel manner? What have I done?"

"Done!" returned the old man, pointing to her sister's place. "Where's your affectionate, invaluable friend? Where's your devoted guardian? Where's your more than mother? How dare you set up superiorities against all these characters combined in your sister? For shame, you false girl, for shame!"

"I love Amy," cried Miss Fanny, sobbing and weeping, "as well as I love my life — better than I love my life. I don't deserve to be so treated. I

am as grateful to Amy, and as fond of Amy, as it's possible for any human being to be. I wish I was dead. I never was so wickedly wronged. And only because I am anxious for the family credit."

"To the winds with the family credit!" cried the old man with great scorn and indignation. "Brother, I protest against pride. I protest against ingratitude. I protest against any one of us here who have known what we have known, and have seen what we have seen, setting up at any pretension that puts Amy at a moment's disadvantage, or to the cost of a moment's pain. We may know that it's a base pretension by its having that effect. It ought to bring a judgment on us. Brother, I protest against it, in the sight of God!"

As his hand went up above his head and came down on the table, it might have been a blacksmith's. After a few moments' silence, it had relaxed into its usual weak condition. He went round to his brother with his ordinary shuffling step, put the hand on his shoulder, and said, in a softened voice, "William, my dear, I felt obliged to say it; forgive me, for I felt obliged to say it!" and then went, in his bowed way, out of the palace hall, just as he might have gone out of the Marshalsea room.

All this time Fanny had been sobbing and crying, and still continued to do so. Edward, beyond opening his mouth in amazement, had not opened his lips, and had done nothing but stare. Mr. Dorrit also had been utterly discomfited, and quite unable to assert himself in any way. Fanny was now the first to speak.

"I never, never, never was so used!" she sobbed. "There never was anything so harsh and unjusti-

fiable, so disgracefully violent and cruel! Dear, kind, quiet little Amy, too, what would she feel if she could know that she had been innocently the means of exposing me to such treatment! But I'll never tell her! No, good darling, I'll never tell her!"

This helped Mr. Dorrit to break his silence.

"My dear," said he, "I — ha — approve of your resolution. It will be — ha, hum — much better not to speak of this to Amy. It might — hum — it might distress her. Ha. No doubt it would distress her greatly. It is considerate and right to avoid doing so. We will — ha — keep this to ourselves."

"But the cruelty of uncle!" cried Miss Fanny. "Oh, I never can forgive the wanton cruelty of uncle!"

"My dear," said Mr. Dorrit, recovering his tone, though he remained unusually pale, "I must request you not to say so. You must remember that your uncle is — ha — not what he formerly was. You must remember that your uncle's state requires — hum — great forbearance from us, great forbearance."

"I am sure," cried Fanny piteously, "it is only charitable to suppose that there must be something wrong in him somewhere, or he never could have so attacked Me, of all the people in the world."

"Fanny," returned Mr. Dorrit in a deeply fraternal tone, "you know, with his innumerable good points, what a — hum — Wreck your uncle is; and I entreat you, by the fondness that I have for him, and by the fidelity that you know I have always shown him, to — ha — to draw your own conclusions, and to spare my brotherly feelings."

This ended the scene; Edward Dorrit, Esquire, saying nothing throughout, but looking, to the last, perplexed and doubtful. Miss Fanny awakened much affectionate uneasiness in her sister's mind that day by passing the greater part of it in violent fits of embracing her, and in alternately giving her brooches, and wishing herself dead.

CHAPTER VI.

SOMETHING RIGHT SOMEWHERE.

To be in the halting state of Mr. Henry Gowan; to have left one of two Powers in disgust, to want the necessary qualifications for finding promotion with another, and to be loitering moodily about on neutral ground, cursing both; is to be in a situation unwholesome for the mind, which time is not likely to improve. The worst class of sum worked in the every-day world is ciphered by the diseased arithmeticians who are always in the rule of Subtraction as to the merits and successes of others, and never in Addition as to their own.

The habit, too, of seeking some sort of recompense in the discontented boast of being disappointed, is a habit fraught with degeneracy. A certain idle carelessness and recklessness of consistency soon comes of it. To bring deserving things down by setting undeserving things up is one of its perverted delights: and there is no playing fast and loose with the truth, in any game, without growing the worse for it.

In his expressed opinions of all performances in the art of painting that were completely destitute of merit, Gowan was the most liberal fellow on earth.

He would declare such a man to have more power in his little finger (provided he had none) than such another had (provided he had much) in his whole mind and body. If the objection were taken that the thing commended was trash, he would reply, on behalf of his art, "My good fellow, what do we all turn out but trash? *I* turn out nothing else, and I make you a present of the confession."

To make a vaunt of being poor was another of the incidents of his splenetic state, though this may have had the design in it of showing that he ought to be rich; just as he would publicly laud and decry the Barnacles, lest it should be forgotten that he belonged to the family. Howbeit, these two subjects were very often on his lips; and he managed them so well, that he might have praised himself by the month together, and not have made himself out half so important a man as he did by his light disparagement of his claims on anybody's consideration.

Out of this same airy talk of his it always soon came to be understood, wherever he and his wife went, that he had married against the wishes of his exalted relations, and had had much ado to prevail on them to countenance her. He never made the representation; on the contrary, seemed to laugh the idea to scorn; but it did happen that, with all his pains to depreciate himself, he was always in the superior position. From the days of their honeymoon, Minnie Gowan felt sensible of being usually regarded as the wife of a man who had made a descent in marrying her, but whose chivalrous love for her had cancelled that inequality.

To Venice they had been accompanied by Monsieur Blandois of Paris, and at Venice Monsieur

Blandois of Paris was very much in the society of Gowan. When they had first met this gallant gentleman at Geneva, Gowan had been undecided whether to kick him or encourage him; and had remained, for about four and twenty hours, so troubled to settle the point to his satisfaction, that he had thought of tossing up a five-franc piece on the terms, "Tails, kick; heads, encourage," and abiding by the voice of the oracle. It chanced, however, that his wife expressed a dislike to the engaging Blandois, and that the balance of feeling in the hotel was against him. Upon that, Gowan resolved to encourage him.

Why this perversity, if it were not in a generous fit? — which it was not. Why should Gowan, very much the superior of Blandois of Paris, and very well able to pull that prepossessing gentleman to pieces, and find out the stuff he was made of, take up with such a man? In the first place, he opposed the first separate wish he observed in his wife, because her father had paid his debts, and it was desirable to take an early opportunity of asserting his independence. In the second place, he opposed the prevalent feeling, because, with many capacities of being otherwise, he was an ill-conditioned man. He found a pleasure in declaring that a courtier with the refined manners of Blandois ought to rise to the greatest distinction in any polished country. He found a pleasure in setting up Blandois as the type of elegance, and making him a satire upon others who piqued themselves on personal graces. He seriously protested that the bow of Blandois was perfect, that the address of Blandois was irresistible, and that the picturesque ease of Blandois would

be cheaply purchased (if it were not a gift, and unpurchasable) for a hundred thousand francs. That exaggeration in the manner of the man, which has been noticed as appertaining to him and to every such man, whatever his original breeding, as certainly as the sun belongs to this system, was acceptable to Gowan as a caricature, which he found it a humorous resource to have at hand for the ridiculing of numbers of people who necessarily did more or less of what Blandois overdid. Thus he had taken up with him; and thus, negligently strengthening these inclinations with habit, and idly deriving some amusement from his talk, he had glided into a way of having him for a companion. This, though he supposed him to live by his wits at play-tables and the like; though he suspected him to be a coward, while he himself was daring and courageous; though he thoroughly knew him to be disliked by Minnie; and though he cared so little for him, after all, that if he had given her any tangible personal cause to regard him with aversion, he would have had no compunction whatever in flinging him out of the highest window in Venice into the deepest water of the city.

Little Dorrit would have been glad to make her visit to Mrs. Gowan alone; but, as Fanny, who had not yet recovered from her uncle's protest, though it was four and twenty hours of age, pressingly offered her company, the two sisters stepped together into one of the gondolas under Mr. Dorrit's window, and, with the courier in attendance, were taken in high state to Mrs. Gowan's lodging. In truth, their state was rather too high for the lodging, which was, as Fanny complained, "fearfully

out of the way," and which took them through a complexity of narrow streets of water, which the same lady disparaged as "mere ditches."

The house, on a little desert island, looked as if it had broken away from somewhere else, and had floated by chance into its present anchorage, in company with a vine almost as much in want of training as the poor wretches who were lying under its leaves. The features of the surrounding picture were, a church with hoarding and scaffolding about it, which had been under supposititious repair so long that the means of repair looked a hundred years old, and had themselves fallen into decay; a quantity of washed linen, spread to dry in the sun; a number of houses at odds with one another, and grotesquely out of the perpendicular, like rotten pre-Adamite cheeses cut into fantastic shapes, and full of mites; and a feverish bewilderment of windows, with their lattice blinds all hanging askew, and something draggled and dirty dangling out of most of them.

On the first floor of the house was a Bank — a surprising experience for any gentleman of commercial pursuits bringing laws for all mankind from a British city — where two spare clerks, like dried dragoons, in green velvet caps adorned with golden tassels, stood, bearded, behind a small counter in a small room, containing no other visible objects than an empty iron safe, with the door open, a jug of water, and a papering of garlands of roses; but who, on lawful requisition, by merely dipping their hands out of sight, could produce exhaustless mounds of five-franc pieces. Below the Bank was a suite of three or four rooms with barred windows,

which had the appearance of a jail for criminal rats. Above the Bank was Mrs. Gowan's residence.

Notwithstanding that its walls were blotched, as if missionary maps were bursting out of them to impart geographical knowledge; notwithstanding that its weird furniture was forlornly faded and musty, and that the prevailing Venetian odor of bilge-water and an ebb tide on a weedy shore was very strong; the place was better within than it promised. The door was opened by a smiling man like a reformed assassin — a temporary servant — who ushered them into the room where Mrs. Gowan sat: with the announcement that two beautiful English ladies were come to see the mistress.

Mrs. Gowan, who was engaged in needlework, put her work aside in a covered basket, and rose, a little hurriedly. Miss Fanny was excessively courteous to her, and said the usual nothings with the skill of a veteran.

"Papa was extremely sorry," proceeded Fanny, "to be engaged to-day (he is so much engaged here, our acquaintance being so wretchedly large!); and particularly requested me to bring his card for Mr. Gowan. That I may be sure to acquit myself of a commission which he impressed upon me at least a dozen times, allow me to relieve my conscience by placing it on the table at once."

Which she did with veteran ease.

"We have been," said Fanny, "charmed to understand that you know the Merdles. We hope it may be another means of bringing us together."

"They are friends," said Mrs. Gowan, "of Mr. Gowan's family. I have not yet had the pleasure

of a personal introduction to Mrs. Merdle, but I suppose I shall be presented to her at Rome."

"Indeed!" returned Fanny with an appearance of amiably quenching her own superiority. "I think you'll like her."

"You know her very well?"

"Why, you see," said Fanny with a frank action of her pretty shoulders, "in London one knows every one. We met her on our way here, and, to say the truth, papa was at first rather cross with her for taking one of the rooms that our people had ordered for us. However, of course that soon blew over, and we were all good friends again."

Although the visit had, as yet, given Little Dorrit no opportunity of conversing with Mrs. Gowan, there was a silent understanding between them, which did as well. She looked at Mrs. Gowan with keen and unabated interest; the sound of her voice was thrilling to her; nothing that was near her, or about her, or at all concerned her, escaped Little Dorrit. She was quicker to perceive the slightest matter here than in any other case — but one.

"You have been quite well," she now said, "since that night?"

"Quite, my dear. And you?"

"Oh! I am always well," said Little Dorrit timidly. "I — yes, thank you."

There was no reason for her faltering and breaking off, other than that Mrs. Gowan had touched her hand in speaking to her, and their looks had met. Something thoughtfully apprehensive in the large, soft eyes had checked Little Dorrit in an instant.

"You don't know that you are a favorite of my husband's, and that I am almost bound to be jealous of you?" said Mrs. Gowan.

Little Dorrit, blushing, shook her head.

"He will tell you, if he tells you what he tells me, that you are quieter, and quicker of resource, than any one he ever saw."

"He speaks far too well of me," said Little Dorrit.

"I doubt that; but I don't at all doubt that I must tell him you are here. I should never be forgiven if I were to let you — and Miss Dorrit — go without doing so. May I? You can excuse the disorder and discomfort of a painter's studio?"

The inquiries were addressed to Miss Fanny, who graciously replied that she would be beyond anything interested and enchanted. Mrs. Gowan went to a door, looked in beyond it, and came back. "Do Henry the favor to come in," said she. "I knew he would be pleased!"

The first object that confronted Little Dorrit, entering first, was Blandois of Paris in a great cloak and a furtive slouched hat, standing on a throne-platform in a corner, as he had stood on the Great Saint Bernard, when the warning arms seemed to be all pointing up at him. She recoiled from this figure as it smiled at her.

"Don't be alarmed," said Gowan coming from his easel behind the door. "It's only Blandois. He is doing duty as a model to-day. I am making a study of him. It saves me money to turn him to some use. We poor painters have none to spare."

Blandois of Paris pulled off his slouched hat, and saluted the ladies without coming out of his corner.

"A thousand pardons!" said he. "But the Professor here is so inexorable with me that I am afraid to stir."

"Don't stir, then," said Gowan coolly, as the sisters approached the easel. "Let the ladies at least see the original of the daub, that they may know what it's meant for. There he stands, you see. A bravo waiting for his prey, a distinguished noble waiting to save his country, the common enemy waiting to do somebody a bad turn, an angelic messenger waiting to do somebody a good turn — whatever you think he looks most like!"

"Say, Professore Mio, a poor gentleman waiting to do homage to elegance and beauty," remarked Blandois.

"Or say, Cattivo Soggetto Mio," returned Gowan, touching the painted face with his brush in the part where the real face had moved, "a murderer after the fact. Show that white hand of yours, Blandois. Put it outside the cloak. Keep it still."

Blandois' hand was unsteady; but he laughed, and that would naturally shake it.

"He was formerly in some scuffle with another murderer, or with a victim, you observe," said Gowan, putting in the markings of the hand with a quick, impatient, unskilful touch, "and these are the tokens of it. Outside the cloak, man! — Corpo di San Marco, what are you thinking of?"

Blandois of Paris shook with a laugh again, so that his hand shook more; now he raised it to twist his mustache, which had a damp appearance; and now he stood in the required position, with a little new swagger.

His face was so directed in reference to the spot

where Little Dorrit stood by the easel, that throughout he looked at her. Once attracted by his peculiar eyes, she could not remove her own, and they had looked at each other all the time. She trembled now; Gowan, feeling it, and supposing her to be alarmed by the large dog beside him, whose head she caressed in her hand, and who had just returned a low growl, glanced at her to say, "He won't hurt you, Miss Dorrit."

"I am not afraid of him," she returned in the same breath; "but will you look at him?"

In a moment Gowan had thrown down his brush, and seized the dog with both hands by the collar.

"Blandois! How can you be such a fool as to provoke him? By Heaven, and the other place too, he'll tear you to bits! Lie down! Lion! Do you hear my voice, you rebel?"

The great dog, regardless of being half choked by his collar, was obdurately pulling with his dead weight against his master, resolved to get across the room. He had been crouching for a spring at the moment when his master caught him.

"Lion! Lion!" He was up on his hind-legs, and it was a wrestle between master and dog. "Get back! Down, Lion! Get out of his sight, Blandois! What devil have you conjured into this dog?"

"I have done nothing to him."

"Get out of his sight, or I can't hold the wild beast! Get out of the room! By my soul, he'll kill you!"

The dog, with a ferocious bark, made one other struggle as Blandois vanished; then, in the moment of the dog's submission, the master, little less angry than the dog, felled him with a blow on the

head, and, standing over him, struck him many times severely with the heel of his boot, so that his mouth was presently bloody.

"Now get you into that corner and lie down," said Gowan, "or I'll take you out and shoot you."

Lion did as he was ordered, and lay down licking his mouth and chest. Lion's master stopped for a moment to take breath, and then, recovering his usual coolness of manner, turned to speak to his frightened wife and her visitors. Probably the whole occurrence had not occupied two minutes.

"Come, come, Minnie! You know he is always good-humored and tractable. Blandois must have irritated him,—made faces at him. The dog has his likings and dislikings, and Blandois is no great favorite of his; but I am sure you'll give him a character, Minnie, for never having been like this before."

Minnie was too much disturbed to say anything connected in reply; Little Dorrit was already occupied in soothing her; Fanny, who had cried out twice or thrice, held Gowan's arm for protection; Lion, deeply ashamed of having caused them this alarm, came trailing himself along the ground to the feet of his mistress.

"You furious brute!" said Gowan, striking him with his foot again. "You shall do penance for this." And he struck him again, and yet again.

"Oh, pray don't punish him any more!" cried Little Dorrit. "Don't hurt him. See how gentle he is!" At her entreaty, Gowan spared him; and he deserved her intercession, for truly he was as submissive, and as sorry, and as wretched as a dog could be.

It was not easy to recover this shock and make the visit unrestrained, even though Fanny had not been, under the best of circumstances, the least trifle in the way. In such further communication as passed among them before the sisters took their departure, Little Dorrit fancied it was revealed to her that Mr. Gowan treated his wife, even in his very fondness, too much like a beautiful child. He seemed so unsuspicious of the depths of feeling which she knew must lie below that surface, that she doubted if there could be any such depths in himself. She wondered whether his want of earnestness might be the natural result of his want of such qualities, and whether it was with people as with ships, that, in too shallow and rocky waters, their anchors had no hold, and they drifted anywhere.

He attended them down the staircase, jocosely apologizing for the poor quarters to which such poor fellows as himself were limited, and remarking that when the high and mighty Barnacles, his relatives, who would be dreadfully ashamed of them, presented him with better, he would live in better to oblige them. At the water's edge they were saluted by Blandois, who looked white enough after his late adventure, but who made very light of it notwithstanding, — laughing at the mention of Lion.

Leaving the two together under the scrap of vine upon the causeway, Gowan idly scattering the leaves from it into the water, and Blandois lighting a cigarette, the sisters were paddled away in state as they had come. They had not glided on for many minutes, when Little Dorrit became aware

that Fanny was more showy in manner than the occasion appeared to require, and, looking about for the cause, through the window and through the open door, saw another gondola evidently in waiting on them.

As this gondola attended their progress in various artful ways; sometimes shooting on ahead, and stopping to let them pass; sometimes, when the way was broad enough, skimming along side by side with them; and sometimes following close astern; and as Fanny gradually made no disguise that she was playing off graces upon somebody within it, of whom she at the same time feigned to be unconscious; Little Dorrit at length asked who it was?

To which Fanny made the short answer, "That gaby."

"Who?" said Little Dorrit.

"My dear child," returned Fanny (in a tone suggesting that, before her uncle's protest, she might have said, You little fool! instead), "how slow you are! Young Sparkler."

She lowered the window on her side, and, leaning back and resting her elbow on it negligently, fanned herself with a rich Spanish fan of black and gold. The attendant gondola having skimmed forward again, with some swift trace of an eye in the window, Fanny laughed coquettishly, and said, "Did you ever see such a fool, my love?"

"Do you think he means to follow you all the way?" asked Little Dorrit.

"My precious child," returned Fanny, "I can't possibly answer for what an idiot in a state of desperation may do, but I should think it highly

probable. It's not such an enormous distance. All Venice would scarcely be that, I imagine, if he's dying for a glimpse of me."

"And is he?" asked Little Dorrit in perfect simplicity.

"Well, my love, that really is an awkward question for *me* to answer," said her sister. "I believe he is. You had better ask Edward. He tells Edward he is, I believe. I understand he makes a perfect spectacle of himself at the Casino, and that sort of places, by going on about me. But you had better ask Edward if you want to know."

"I wonder he doesn't call," said Little Dorrit after thinking a moment.

"My dear Amy, your wonder will soon cease, if I am rightly informed. I should not be at all surprised if he called to-day. The creature has only been waiting to get his courage up, I suspect."

"Will you see him?"

"Indeed, my darling," said Fanny, "that's just as it may happen. Here he is again. Look at him. Oh, you simpleton!"

Mr. Sparkler had, undeniably, a weak appearance; with his eye in the window like a knot in the glass, and no reason on earth for stopping his bark suddenly, except the real reason.

"When you asked me if I will see him, my dear," said Fanny, almost as well composed in the graceful indifference of her attitude as Mrs. Merdle herself, "what do you mean?"

"I mean," said Little Dorrit — "I think I rather mean, what do you mean, dear Fanny?"

Fanny laughed again, in a manner at once condescending, arch, and affable; and said, putting her

arm round her sister in a playfully affectionate way,—

"Now tell me, my little pet. When we saw that woman at Martigny, how did you think she carried it off? Did you see what she decided on in a moment?"

"No, Fanny."

"Then I'll tell you, Amy. She settled with herself, now I'll never refer to that meeting under such different circumstances, and I'll never pretend to have any idea that these are the same girls. That's *her* way out of a difficulty. What did I tell you when we came away from Harley Street that time? She is as insolent and false as any woman in the world. But in the first capacity, my love, she may find people who can match her."

A significant turn of the Spanish fan towards Fanny's bosom indicated with great expression where one of these people was to be found.

"Not only that," pursued Fanny, "but she gives the same charge to Young Sparkler; and doesn't let him come after me until she has got it thoroughly into his most ridiculous of all ridiculous noddles (for one really can't call it a head) that he is to pretend to have been first struck with me in that Inn Yard."

"Why?" asked Little Dorrit.

"Why? Good gracious, my love!" (again very much in the tone of You stupid little creature!) "how can you ask? Don't you see that I may have become a rather desirable match for a noodle? And don't you see that she puts the deception upon us, and makes a pretence, while she shifts it from her own shoulders (very good shoulders they are too, I

must say)," observed Miss Fanny, glancing complacently at herself, "of considering our feelings?"

"But we can always go back to the plain truth."

"Yes, but if you please we won't," retorted Fanny. "No; I am not going to have that done, Amy. The pretext is none of mine; it's hers, and she shall have enough of it."

In the triumphant exultation of her feelings, Miss Fanny, using her Spanish fan with one hand, squeezed her sister's waist with the other, as if she were crushing Mrs. Merdle.

"No," repeated Fanny. "She shall find me go her way. She took it, and I'll follow it. And, with the blessing of fate and fortune, I'll go on improving that woman's acquaintance until I have given her maid, before her eyes, things from my dressmaker's ten times as handsome and expensive as she once gave me from hers!"

Little Dorrit was silent: sensible that she was not to be heard on any question affecting the family dignity; and unwilling to lose to no purpose her sister's newly and unexpectedly restored favor. She could not concur, but she was silent. Fanny well knew what she was thinking of; so well, that she soon asked her.

Her reply was, "Do you mean to encourage Mr. Sparkler, Fanny?"

"Encourage him, my dear?" said her sister, smiling contemptuously. "That depends upon what you call encourage. No, I don't mean to encourage him. But I'll make a slave of him."

Little Dorrit glanced seriously and doubtfully in her face, but Fanny was not to be so brought to a check. She furled her fan of black and gold, and

rose more restored than might have been expected, and stammered for himself, with blushes, "Not at all so." Miss Fanny had no recollection of having ever seen him before, and was passing on with a distant inclination of her head, when he announced himself by name. Even then she was in a difficulty from being unable to call it to mind, until he explained that he had had the honor of seeing her at Martigny. Then she remembered him, and hoped his lady mother was well.

"Thank you," stammered Mr. Sparkler, "she's uncommonly well — at least, poorly."

"In Venice?" said Miss Fanny.

"In Rome," Mr. Sparkler answered. "I am here by myself, myself. I came to call upon Mr. Edward Dorrit, myself. Indeed, upon Mr. Dorrit likewise. In fact, upon the family."

Turning graciously to the attendants, Miss Fanny inquired whether her papa or brother was within? The reply being that they were both within, Mr. Sparkler humbly offered his arm. Miss Fanny, accepting it, was squired up the great staircase by Mr. Sparkler, who, if he still believed (which there is not any reason to doubt) that she had no nonsense about her, rather deceived himself.

Arrived in a mouldering reception-room, where the faded hangings, of a sad sea-green, had worn and withered until they looked as if they might have claimed kindred with the waifs of seaweed drifting under the windows, or clinging to the walls and weeping for their imprisoned relations, Miss Fanny despatched emissaries for her father and brother. Pending whose appearance, she showed to great advantage on a sofa, completing Mr. Sparkler's

quest with some remarks upon Dante — known that gentleman as an eccentric man in the nature an Old File, who used to put leaves round his ad, and sit upon a stool for some unaccountable purpose, outside the cathedral at Florence.

Mr. Dorrit welcomed the visitor with the highest urbanity and most courtly manners. He inquired rticularly after Mrs. Merdle. He inquired par- larly after Mr. Mer Mr. Sparkler said, or ner twitched out of f in small pieces by the shirt collar, that Mrs. Merdle, having completely used up her place in the cou y, and also her house at Brighton, and being, of se, unable, don't you see, to remain in London n there wasn't a soul there, and not feeling hers this year quite up to visiting about at people's pa ces, had resolved to have a touch at Rome, where a woman like herself, with a proverbially fine ap arance and with no nonsense about her, couldn't il to be a great acquisition. As to Mr. Merdle, he was so much wanted by the men in the City and the rest of those places, and was such a doosed extraordinary phenomenon in Buying and Banking and that, that Mr. Sparkler doubted if the monetary system of the country would be able to spare him: though that his work was occasionally one too many for him, and that he would be all the better for a temporary shy at an entirely new scene and climate, Mr. Sparkler did not conceal. As to himself, Mr. Sparkler conveyed to the Dorrit family that he was going, on rather particular business, wherever they were going.

This immense conversational achievement required time, but was effected. Being effected, Mr. Dorrit expressed his hope that Mr. Sparkler

would shortly dine with them. Mr. Sparkler received the idea so kindly, that Mr. Dorrit asked what he was going to do that day, for instance? As he was going to do nothing that day (his usual occupation, and one for which he was particularly qualified), he was secured without postponement; being further bound over to accompany the ladies to the Opera in the evening.

At dinner-time Mr. Sparkler rose out of the sea, like Venus's son taking after his mother, and made a splendid appearance ascending the great staircase. If Fanny had been charming in the morning, she was now thrice charming, very becomingly dressed in her most suitable colors, and with an air of negligence upon her that doubled Mr. Sparkler's fetters, and riveted them.

"I hear you are acquainted, Mr. Sparkler," said his host at dinner, "with — ha — Mr. Gowan. Mr. Henry Gowan?"

"Perfectly, sir," returned Mr. Sparkler. "His mother and my mother are cronies, in fact."

"If I had thought of it, Amy," said Mr. Dorrit, with a patronage as magnificent as that of Lord Decimus himself, "you should have despatched a note to them, asking them to dine to-day. Some of our people could have — ha — fetched them, and taken them home. We could have spared a — hum — gondola for that purpose. I am sorry to have forgotten this. Pray remind me of them to-morrow."

Little Dorrit was not without doubts how Mr. Henry Gowan might take their patronage; but, she promised not to fail in the reminder.

"Pray, does Mr. Henry Gowan paint — ha — Portraits?" inquired Mr. Dorrit.

Mr. Sparkler opined that he painted anything, if he could get the job.

"He has no particular walk?" said Mr. Dorrit.

Mr. Sparkler, stimulated by Love to brilliancy, replied that, for a particular walk, a man ought to have a particular pair of shoes: as, for example, shooting, shooting-shoes; cricket, cricket-shoes. Whereas, he believed that Henry Gowan had no particular pair of shoes.

"No specialty?" said Mr. Dorrit.

This being a very long word for Mr. Sparkler, and his mind being exhausted by his late effort, he replied, "No, thank you. I seldom take it."

"Well!" said Mr. Dorrit, "it would be very agreeable to me to present a gentleman so connected with some — ha — Testimonial of my desire to further his interests, and develop the — hum — germs of his genius. I think I must engage Mr. Gowan to paint my picture. If the result should be — ha — mutually satisfactory, I might afterwards engage him to try his hand upon my family."

The exquisitely bold and original thought presented itself to Mr. Sparkler, that there was an opening here for saying there were some of the family (emphasizing "some" in a marked manner) to whom no painter could render justice. But, for want of a form of words in which to express the idea, it returned to the skies.

This was the more to be regretted as Miss Fanny greatly applauded the notion of the portrait, and urged her papa to act upon it. She surmised, she said, that Mr. Gowan had lost better and higher opportunities by marrying his pretty wife; and Love in a cottage, painting pictures for dinner,

was so delightfully interesting, that she begged her papa to give him the commission, whether he could paint a likeness or not: though, indeed, both she and Amy knew he could, from having seen a speaking likeness on his easel that day, and having had the opportunity of comparing it with the original. These remarks made Mr. Sparkler (as perhaps they were intended to do) nearly distracted; for while, on the one hand, they expressed Miss Fanny's susceptibility to the tender passion, she herself showed such an innocent unconsciousness of his admiration, that his eyes goggled in his head with jealousy of an unknown rival.

Descending into the sea again after dinner, and ascending out of it at the Opera staircase, preceded by one of their gondoliers, like an attendant Merman, with a great linen lantern, they entered their box, and Mr. Sparkler entered on an evening of agony. The theatre being dark, and the box light, several visitors lounged in during the representation; in whom Fanny was so interested, and in conversation with whom she fell into such charming attitudes, as she had little confidences with them, and little disputes concerning the identity of people in distant boxes, that the wretched Sparkler hated all mankind. But he had two consolations at the close of the performance. She gave him her fan to hold while she adjusted her cloak, and it was his blessed privilege to give her his arm down-stairs again. These crumbs of encouragement, Mr. Sparkler thought, would just keep him going: and it is not impossible that Miss Dorrit thought so too.

The Merman with his light was ready at the box

door, and other Mermen with other lights were ready at many of the doors. The Dorrit Merman held his lantern low, to show the steps, and Mr. Sparkler put on another heavy set of fetters over his former set, as he watched her radiant feet twinkling down the stairs beside him. Among the loiterers here was Blandois of Paris. He spoke, and moved forward beside Fanny.

Little Dorrit was in front, with her brother and Mrs. General (Mr. Dorrit had remained at home); but, on the brink of the quay, they all came together. She started again to find Blandois close to her handing Fanny into the boat.

"Gowan has had a loss," he said, "since he was made happy to-day by a visit from fair ladies."

"A loss?" repeated Fanny, relinquished by the bereaved Sparkler, and taking her seat.

"A loss," said Blandois. "His dog, Lion."

Little Dorrit's hand was in his as he spoke.

"He is dead," said Blandois.

"Dead!" echoed Little Dorrit. "That noble dog?"

"Faith, dear ladies!" said Blandois, smiling and shrugging his shoulders, "somebody has poisoned that noble dog. He is as dead as the Doges!"

CHAPTER VII.

MOSTLY PRUNES AND PRISM.

Mrs. General, always on her coach-box keeping the proprieties well together, took pains to form a surface on her very dear young friend, and Mrs. General's very dear young friend tried hard to receive it. Hard as she had tried in her laborious life to attain many ends, she had never tried harder than she did now to be varnished by Mrs. General. It made her anxious and ill at ease to be operated upon by that smoothing hand, it is true; but she submitted herself to the family want in its greatness, as she had submitted herself to the family want in its littleness, and yielded to her own inclinations in this thing no more than she had yielded to her hunger itself in the days when she had saved her dinner that her father might have his supper.

One comfort that she had under the Ordeal by General was more sustaining to her, and made her more grateful, than to a less devoted and affectionate spirit, not habituated to her struggles and sacrifices, might appear quite reasonable: and, indeed, it may often be observed in life that spirits like Little Dorrit do not appear to reason half as carefully as the folks who get the better of them. The con-

tinued kindness of her sister was this comfort to Little Dorrit. It was nothing to her that the kindness took the form of tolerant patronage; she was used to that. It was nothing to her that it kept her in a tributary position, and showed her in attendance on the flaming car in which Miss Fanny sat on an elevated seat, exacting homage; she sought no better place. Always admiring Fanny's beauty, and grace, and readiness, and not now asking herself how much of her disposition to be strongly attached to Fanny was due to her own heart, and how much to Fanny's, she gave her all the sisterly fondness her great heart contained.

The wholesale amount of Prunes and Prism which Mrs. General infused into the family life, combined with the perpetual plunges made by Fanny into society, left but a very small residue of any natural deposit at the bottom of the mixture. This rendered confidences with Fanny doubly precious to Little Dorrit, and heightened the relief they afforded her.

"Amy," said Fanny to her, one night when they were alone, after a day so tiring that Little Dorrit was quite worn out, though Fanny would have taken another dip into society with the greatest pleasure in life, "I am going to put something into your little head. You won't guess what it is, I suspect."

"I don't think that's likely, dear," said Little Dorrit.

"Come, I'll give you a clew, child," said Fanny. "Mrs. General."

Prunes and Prism, in a thousand combinations, having been wearily in the ascendant all day —

everything having been surface and varnish, and show without substance — Little Dorrit looked as if she had hoped that Mrs. General was safely tucked up in bed for some hours.

"*Now* can you guess, Amy?" said Fanny.

"No, dear. Unless I have done anything," said Little Dorrit, rather alarmed, and meaning anything calculated to crack varnish and ruffle surface.

Fanny was so very much amused by the misgiving, that she took up her favorite fan (being then seated at her dressing-table with her armory of cruel instruments about her, most of them reeking from the heart of Sparkler), and tapped her sister frequently on the nose with it, laughing all the time.

"Oh, our Amy, our Amy!" said Fanny. "What a timid little goose our Amy is! But this is nothing to laugh at. On the contrary, I am very cross, my dear."

"As it is not with me, Fanny, I don't mind," returned her sister, smiling.

"Ah! But I do mind," said Fanny, "and so will you, Pet, when I enlighten you. Amy, has it never struck you that somebody is monstrously polite to Mrs. General?"

"Everybody is polite to Mrs. General," said Little Dorrit. "Because" —

"Because she freezes them into it?" interrupted Fanny. "I don't mean that; quite different from that. Come! Has it never struck you, Amy, that pa is monstrously polite to Mrs. General?"

Amy, murmuring "No," looked quite confounded.

"No; I dare say not. But he is," said Fanny. "He is, Amy. And remember my words. Mrs. General has designs on pa!"

"Dear Fanny, do you think it possible that Mrs. General has designs on any one?"

"Do I think it possible?" retorted Fanny. "My love, I know it. I tell you she has designs on pa. And more than that, I tell you, pa considers her such a wonder, such a paragon of accomplishment, and such an acquisition to our family, that he is ready to get himself into a state of perfect infatuation with her at any moment. And that opens a pretty picture of things, I hope! Think of me with Mrs. General for a mamma!"

Little Dorrit did not reply, "Think of me with Mrs. General for a mamma;" but she looked anxious, and seriously inquired what had led Fanny to these conclusions.

"Lord, my darling!" said Fanny tartly. "You might as well ask me how I know when a man is struck with myself! But, of course I do know. It happens pretty often; but I always know it. I know this in much the same way, I suppose. At all events, I know it."

"You never heard papa say anything?"

"Say anything!" repeated Fanny. "My dearest, darling child, what necessity has he had, yet a while, to say anything?"

"And you have never heard Mrs. General say anything?"

"My goodness me, Amy," returned Fanny, "is she the sort of woman to say anything? Isn't it perfectly plain and clear that she has nothing to do at present, but to hold herself upright, keep her aggravating gloves on, and go sweeping about? Say anything! If she had the ace of trumps in her hand at whist, she wouldn't say anything, child. It would come out when she played it."

"At least, you may be mistaken, Fanny. Now may you not?"

"Oh yes, I *may* be," said Fanny, "but I am not! However, I am glad you can contemplate such an escape, my dear, and I am glad that you can take this, for the present, with sufficient coolness to think of such a chance. It makes me hope that you may be able to bear the connection. I should not be able to bear it, and I should not try. I'd marry Young Sparkler first."

"Oh, you would never marry him, Fanny, under any circumstances!"

"Upon my word, my dear," rejoined that young lady with exceeding indifference, "I wouldn't positively answer even for that. There's no knowing what might happen. Especially as I should have many opportunities, afterwards, of treating that woman, his mother, in her own style. Which I most decidedly should not be slow to avail myself of, Amy."

No more passed between the sisters then; but what had passed gave the two subjects of Mrs. General and Mr. Sparkler great prominence in Little Dorrit's mind, and thenceforth she thought very much of both.

Mrs. General having long ago formed her own surface to such perfection that it hid whatever was below it (if anything), no observation was to be made in that quarter. Mr. Dorrit was undeniably very polite to her, and had a high opinion of her; but Fanny, impetuous at most times, might easily be wrong for all that. Whereas, the Sparkler question was on the different footing that any one could see what was going on there, and Little Dorrit saw

it, and pondered on it, with many doubts and wonderings.

The devotion of Mr. Sparkler was only to be equalled by the caprice and cruelty of his enslaver. Sometimes she would prefer him to such distinction of notice, that he would chuckle aloud with joy; next day, or next hour, she would overlook him so completely, and drop him into such an abyss of obscurity, that he would groan under a weak pretence of coughing. The constancy of his attendance never touched Fanny: though he was so inseparable from Edward, that when that gentleman wished for a change of society he was under the irksome necessity of gliding out like a conspirator, in disguised boats and by secret doors and back ways; though he was so solicitous to know how Mr. Dorrit was, that he called every other day to inquire, as if Mr. Dorrit were the prey of an intermittent fever; though he was so constantly being paddled up and down before the principal windows, that he might have been supposed to have made a wager for a large stake to be paddled a thousand miles in a thousand hours: though, whenever the gondola of his mistress left the gate, the gondola of Mr. Sparkler shot out from some watery ambush and gave chase, as if she were a fair smuggler, and he a custom-house officer. It was probably owing to this fortification of the natural strength of his constitution with so much exposure to the air and the salt sea, that Mr. Sparkler did not pine outwardly; but, whatever the cause, he was so far from having any prospect of moving his mistress by a languishing state of health, that he grew bluffer every day, and that peculiarity in his appearance of seeming

rather a swelled boy than a young man became developed to an extraordinary degree of ruddy puffiness.

Blandois calling to pay his respects, Mr. Dorrit received him with affability as the friend of Mr. Gowan, and mentioned to him his idea of commissioning Mr. Gowan to transmit him to posterity. Blandois highly extolling it, it occurred to Mr. Dorrit that it might be agreeable to Blandois to communicate to his friend the great opportunity reserved for him. Blandois accepted the commission with his own free elegance of manner, and swore he would discharge it before he was an hour older. On his imparting the news to Gowan, that Master gave Mr. Dorrit to the Devil with great liberality some round dozen of times (for he resented patronage almost as much as he resented the want of it), and was inclined to quarrel with his friend for bringing him the message.

"It may be a defect in my mental vision, Blandois," said he, "but may I die if I see what you have to do with this."

"Death of my life!" replied Blandois, "nor I neither, except that I thought I was serving my friend."

"By putting an upstart's hire in his pocket?" said Gowan, frowning. "Do you mean that? Tell your other friend to get his head painted for the sign of some public-house, and to get it done by a sign-painter. Who am I, and who is he?"

"Professore," returned the ambassador, "and who is Blandois?"

Without appearing at all interested in the latter question, Gowan angrily whistled Mr. Dorrit away.

But, next day, he resumed the subject by saying in his off-hand manner, and with a slighting laugh, "Well, Blandois, when shall we go to this Mæcenas of yours? We journeymen must take jobs when we can get them. When shall we go and look after this job?"

"When you will," said the injured Blandois, "as you please. What have I to do with it? What is it to me?"

"I can tell you what it is to me," said Gowan. "Bread and cheese. One must eat! So come along, my Blandois."

Mr. Dorrit received them in the presence of his daughters and of Mr. Sparkler, who happened, by some surprising accident, to be calling there. "How are you, Sparkler?" said Gowan carelessly. "When you have to live by your mother wit, old boy, I hope you may get on better than I do."

Mr. Dorrit then mentioned his proposal. "Sir," said Gowan, laughing, after receiving it gracefully enough, "I am new to the trade, and not expert at its mysteries. I believe I ought to look at you in various lights, tell you you are a capital subject, and consider when I shall be sufficiently disengaged to devote myself with the necessary enthusiasm to the fine picture I mean to make of you. I assure you," and he laughed again, "I feel quite a traitor in the camp of those dear, gifted, good, noble fellows, my brother artists, by not doing the hocus-pocus better. But I have not been brought up to it, and it's too late to learn it. Now, the fact is, I am a very bad painter, but not much worse than the generality. If you are going to throw away a hundred guineas or so, I am as poor as a poor

relation of great people usually is, and I shall be very much obliged to you if you'll throw them away upon me. I'll do the best I can for the money; and if the best should be bad, why, even then, you may probably have a bad picture with a small name to it, instead of a bad picture with a large name to it."

This tone, though not what he had expected, on the whole suited Mr. Dorrit remarkably well. It showed that the gentleman, highly connected, and not a mere workman, would be under an obligation to him. He expressed his satisfaction in placing himself in Mr. Gowan's hands, and trusted that he would have the pleasure, in their characters as private gentlemen, of improving his acquaintance.

"You are very good," said Gowan. "I have not forsworn society since I joined the brotherhood of the brush (the most delightful fellows on the face of the earth), and am glad enough to smell the old fine gunpowder now and then, though it did blow me into mid-air and my present calling. You'll not think, Mr. Dorrit," and here he laughed again in the easiest way, "that I am lapsing into the freemasonry of the craft — for it's not so; upon my life I can't help betraying it wherever I go, though, by Jupiter, I love and honor the craft with all my might — if I propose a stipulation as to time and place?"

Ha! Mr. Dorrit could erect no — hum — suspicion of that kind on Mr. Gowan's frankness.

"Again, you are very good," said Gowan. "Mr. Dorrit, I hear you are going to Rome. I am going to Rome, having friends there. Let me begin to do you the injustice I have conspired to do you there

—not here. We shall all be hurried during the rest of our stay here; and though there's not a poorer man with whole elbows in Venice than myself, I have not quite got all the Amateur out of me yet—compromising the trade again, you see!—and can't fall on to order, in a hurry, for the mere sake of the sixpences."

These remarks were not less favorably received by Mr. Dorrit than their predecessors. They were the prelude to the first reception of Mr. and Mrs. Gowan at dinner, and they skilfully placed Gowan on his usual ground in the new family.

His wife, too, they placed on her usual ground. Miss Fanny understood, with particular distinctness, that Mrs. Gowan's good looks had cost her husband very dear; that there had been a great disturbance about her in the Barnacle family; and that the Dowager Mrs. Gowan, nearly heart-broken, had resolutely set her face against the marriage until overpowered by her maternal feelings. Mrs. General likewise clearly understood that the attachment had occasioned much family grief and dissension. Of honest Mr. Meagles no mention was made; except that it was natural enough that a person of that sort should wish to raise his daughter out of his own obscurity, and that no one could blame him for trying his best to do so.

Little Dorrit's interest in the fair subject of this easily accepted belief was too earnest and watchful to fail in accurate observation. She could see that it had its part in throwing upon Mrs. Gowan the touch of shadow under which she lived, and she even had an instinctive knowledge that there was not the least truth in it. But, it had an influence

in placing obstacles in the way of her association with Mrs. Gowan, by making the Prunes and Prism school excessively polite to her, but not very intimate with her; and Little Dorrit, as an enforced sizar of that college, was obliged to submit herself humbly to its ordinances.

Nevertheless, there was a sympathetic understanding already established between the two, which would have carried them over greater difficulties, and made a friendship out of a more restricted intercourse. As though accidents were determined to be favorable to it, they had a new assurance of congeniality in the aversion which each perceived that the other felt towards Blandois of Paris; an aversion amounting to the repugnance and horror of a natural antipathy towards an odious creature of the reptile kind.

And there was a passive congeniality between them, besides this active one. To both of them Blandois behaved in exactly the same manner; and to both of them his manner had uniformly something in it which they both knew to be different from his bearing towards others. The difference was too minute in its expression to be perceived by others, but they knew it to be there. A mere trick of his evil eyes, a mere turn of his smooth white hand, a mere hair's breadth of addition to the fall of his nose and the rise of the mustache in the most frequent movement of his face, conveyed to both of them equally a swagger personal to themselves. It was as if he had said, "I have a secret power in this quarter. I know what I know."

This had never been felt by them both in so great a degree, and never by each so perfectly to the

knowledge of the other, as on a day when he came to Mr. Dorrit's to take his leave before quitting Venice. Mrs. Gowan was herself there for the same purpose, and he came upon the two together; the rest of the family being out. The two had not been together five minutes, and the peculiar manner seemed to convey to them, "You were going to talk about me. Hah! Behold me here to prevent it!"

"Gowan is coming here?" said Blandois with his smile.

Mrs. Gowan replied, he was not coming.

"Not coming!" said Blandois. "Permit your devoted servant, when you leave here, to escort you home."

"Thank you; I am not going home."

"Not going home!" said Blandois. "Then I am forlorn."

That he might be; but he was not so forlorn as to roam away and leave them together. He sat entertaining them with his finest compliments, and his choicest conversation; but, he conveyed to them, all the time, "No, no, no, dear ladies. Behold me here expressly to prevent it!"

He conveyed it to them with so much meaning, and he had such a diabolical persistency in him, that at length Mrs. Gowan rose to depart. On his offering his hand to Mrs. Gowan to lead her down the staircase, she retained Little Dorrit's hand in hers, with a cautious pressure, and said, "No, thank you. But, if you will please to see if my boatman is there, I shall be obliged to you."

It left him no choice but to go down before them. As he did so, hat in hand, Mrs. Gowan whispered, —

"He killed the dog."

"Does Mr. Gowan know it?" Little Dorrit whispered.

"No one knows it. Don't look towards me; look towards him. He will turn his face in a moment. No one knows it, but I am sure he did. You are?"

"I — I think so," Little Dorrit answered.

"Henry likes him, and will not think ill of him; he is so generous and open himself. But you and I feel sure that we think of him as he deserves. He argued with Henry that the dog had been already poisoned when he changed so, and sprung at him. Henry believes it, but we do not. I see he is listening, but can't hear. Good-by, my love! Good-by!"

The last words were spoken aloud, as the vigilant Blandois stopped, turned his head, and looked at them from the bottom of the staircase. Assuredly he did look then, though he looked his politest, as if any real philanthropist could have desired no better employment than to lash a great stone to his neck, and drop him into the water flowing beyond the dark arched gateway in which he stood. No such benefactor to man being on the spot, he handed Mrs. Gowan to her boat, and stood there until it had shot out of the narrow view; when he handed himself into his own boat and followed.

Little Dorrit had sometimes thought, and now thought again as she retraced her steps up the staircase, that he had made his way too easily into her father's house. But, so many and such varieties of people did the same, through Mr. Dorrit's participation in his elder daughter's society mania, that it was hardly an exceptional case. A perfect fury for making acquaintances on whom to impress their

riches and importance had seized the house of Dorrit.

It appeared on the whole, to Little Dorrit herself, that this same society in which they lived greatly resembled a superior sort of Marshalsea. Numbers of people seemed to come abroad, pretty much as people had come into the prison; through debt, through idleness, relationship, curiosity, and general unfitness for getting on at home. They were brought into these foreign towns in the custody of couriers and local followers, just as the debtors had been brought into the prison. They prowled about the churches and picture-galleries much in the old, dreary, prison-yard manner. They were usually going away again to-morrow or next week, and rarely knew their own minds, and seldom did what they said they would do, or went where they said they would go: in all this, again, very like the prison debtors. They paid high for poor accommodation, and disparaged a place while they pretended to like it: which was exactly the Marshalsea custom. They were envied, when they went away, by people left behind feigning not to want to go: and that, again, was the Marshalsea habit invariably. A certain set of words and phrases, as much belonging to tourists as the College and the Snuggery belonged to the jail, was always in their mouths. They had precisely the same incapacity for settling down to anything as the prisoners used to have; they rather deteriorated one another, as the prisoners used to do; and they wore untidy dresses, and fell into a slouching way of life: still, always like the people in the Marshalsea.

The period of the family's stay at Venice came,

in its course, to an end, and they moved, with their retinue, to Rome. Through a repetition of the former Italian scenes, growing more dirty and more haggard as they went on, and bringing them at length to where the very air was diseased, they passed to their destination. A fine residence had been taken for them on the Corso, and there they took up their abode, in a city where everything seemed to be trying to stand still forever on the ruins of something else —except the water, which, following the eternal laws, tumbled and rolled from its glorious multitude of fountains.

Here it seemed to Little Dorrit that a change came over the Marshalsea spirit of their society, and that Prunes and Prism got the upper hand. Everybody was walking about St. Peter's and the Vatican on somebody else's cork legs, and straining every visible object through everybody else's sieve. Nobody said what anything was, but everybody said what the Mrs. Generals, Mr. Eustace, or somebody else said it was. The whole body of travellers seemed to be a collection of voluntary human sacrifices, bound hand and foot, and delivered over to Mr. Eustace and his attendants, to have the entrails of their intellects arranged according to the taste of that sacred priesthood. Through the rugged remains of temples and tombs and palaces and senate-halls and theatres and amphitheatres of ancient days, hosts of tongue-tied and blindfolded moderns were carefully feeling their way, incessantly repeating Prunes and Prism, in the endeavor to set their lips according to the received forms. Mrs. General was in her pure element. Nobody had an opinion. There was a formation of surface going on around her on an

amazing scale, and it had not a flaw of courage or honest free speech in it.

Another modification of Prunes and Prism insinuated itself on Little Dorrit's notice very shortly after their arrival. They received an early visit from Mrs. Merdle, who led that extensive department of life in the Eternal City that winter; and the skilful manner in which she and Fanny fenced with one another on the occasion almost made her quiet sister wink, like the glittering of small-swords.

"So delighted," said Mrs. Merdle, "to resume an acquaintance so inauspiciously begun at Martigny."

"At Martigny, of course," said Fanny. "Charmed, I am sure!"

"I understand," said Mrs. Merdle, "from my son Edmund Sparkler, that he has already improved that chance occasion. He has returned quite transported with Venice."

"Indeed!" returned the careless Fanny. "Was he there long?"

"I might refer that question to Mr. Dorrit," said Mrs. Merdle, turning the bosom towards that gentleman; "Edmund having been so much indebted to him for rendering his stay agreeable."

"Oh, pray don't speak of it!" returned Fanny. "I believe papa had the pleasure of inviting Mr. Sparkler twice or thrice, — but it was nothing. We had so many people about us, and kept such open house, that if he had that pleasure, it was less than nothing."

"Except, my dear," said Mr. Dorrit, "except — ha — as it afforded me unusual gratification to — hum — show by any means, however slight and worthless, the — ha, hum — high estimation in

which, in — ha — common with the rest of the world, I hold so distinguished and princely a character as Mr. Merdle's."

The bosom received this tribute in its most engaging manner.

"Mr. Merdle," observed Fanny, as a means of dismissing Mr. Sparkler into the background, "is quite a theme of papa's, you must know, Mrs. Merdle."

"I have been — ha — disappointed, madam," said Mr. Dorrit, "to understand from Mr. Sparkler that there is no great — hum — probability of Mr. Merdle's coming abroad."

"Why, indeed," said Mrs. Merdle, "he is so much engaged, and in such request, that I fear not. He has not been able to get abroad for years. You, Miss Dorrit, I believe, have been almost continually abroad for a long time."

"Oh dear yes!" drawled Fanny with the greatest hardihood. "An immense number of years."

"So I should have inferred," said Mrs. Merdle.

"Exactly," said Fanny.

"I trust, however," resumed Mr. Dorrit, "that if I have not the — hum — great advantage of becoming known to Mr. Merdle on this side of the Alps or Mediterranean, I shall have that honor on returning to England. It is an honor I particularly desire and shall particularly esteem."

"Mr. Merdle," said Mrs. Merdle, who had been looking admiringly at Fanny through her eye-glass, "will esteem it, I am sure, no less."

Little Dorrit, still habitually thoughtful and solitary, though no longer alone, at first supposed this to be mere Prunes and Prism. But, as her father,

when they had been to a brilliant reception at Mrs. Merdle's, harped, at their own family breakfast-table, on his wish to know Mr. Merdle, with the contingent view of benefiting by the advice of that wonderful man in the disposal of his fortune, she began to think it had a real meaning, and to entertain a curiosity on her own part to see the shining light of the time.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOWAGER MRS. GOWAN IS REMINDED THAT IT NEVER DOES.

WHILE the waters of Venice and the ruins of Rome were sunning themselves for the pleasure of the Dorrit family, and were daily being sketched out of all earthly proportion, lineament, and likeness by travelling pencils innumerable, the firm of Doyce and Clennam hammered away in Bleeding Heart Yard, and the vigorous clink of iron upon iron was heard there through the working hours.

The younger partner had, by this time, brought the business into sound trim; and the elder, left free to follow his own ingenious devices, had done much to enhance the character of the factory. As an ingenious man, he had necessarily to encounter every discouragement that the ruling powers for a length of time had been able by any means to put in the way of this class of culprits; but that was only reasonable self-defence in the powers, since How to do it must obviously be regarded as the natural and mortal enemy of How not to do it. In this was to be found the basis of the wise system, by tooth and nail upheld by the Circumlocution Office, of warning every ingenious British subject

to be ingenious at his peril; of harassing him, obstructing him, inviting robbers (by making his remedy uncertain, difficult, and expensive) to plunder him, and at the best of confiscating his property after a short term of enjoyment, as though invention were on a par with felony. The system had uniformly found great favor with the Barnacles, and that was only reasonable, too; for one who worthily invents must be in earnest, and the Barnacles abhorred and dreaded nothing half so much. That, again, was very reasonable; since, in a country suffering under the affliction of a great amount of earnestness, there might, in an exceeding short space of time, be not a single Barnacle left sticking to a post.

Daniel Doyce faced his condition with its pains and penalties attached to it, and soberly worked on for the work's sake. Clennam, cheering him with a hearty co-operation, was a moral support to him, besides doing good service in his business relation. The concern prospered, and the partners were fast friends.

But Daniel could not forget the old design of so many years. It was not in reason to be expected that he should; if he could have lightly forgotten it, he could never have conceived it, or had the patience and perseverance to work it out. So Clennam thought when he sometimes observed him of an evening looking over the models and drawings, and consoling himself by muttering with a sigh, as he put them away again, that the thing was as true as it ever was.

To show no sympathy with so much endeavor, and so much disappointment, would have been to

fail in what Clennam regarded as among the implied obligations of his partnership. A revival of the passing interest in the subject which had been by chance awakened at the door of the Circumlocution Office originated in this feeling. He asked his partner to explain the invention to him; "having a lenient consideration," he stipulated, "for my being no workman, Doyce."

"No workman!" said Doyce. "You would have been a thorough workman if you had given yourself to it. You have as good a head for understanding such things as I have met with."

"A totally uneducated one, I am sorry to add," said Clennam.

"I don't know that," returned Doyce, "and I wouldn't have you say that. No man of sense who has been generally improved, and has improved himself, can be called quite uneducated as to anything. I don't particularly favor mysteries. I would as soon, on a fair and clear explanation, be judged by one class of man as another, provided he had the qualification I have named."

"At all events," said Clennam — "this sounds as if we were exchanging compliments, but we know we are not — I shall have the advantage of as plain an explanation as can be given."

"Well!" said Daniel in his steady, even way, "I'll try to make it so."

He had the power, often to be found in union with such a character, of explaining what he himself perceived and meant, with the direct force and distinctness with which it struck his own mind. His manner of demonstration was so orderly and neat and simple, that it was not easy to mistake him.

There was something almost ludicrous in the complete irreconcilability of a vague conventional notion that he must be a visionary man, with the precise, sagacious travelling of his eye and thumb over the plans, their patient stoppages at particular points, their careful returns to other points whence little channels of explanation had to be traced up, and his steady manner of making everything good and everything sound at each important stage, before taking his hearer on a line's breadth further. His dismissal of himself from his description was hardly less remarkable. He never said, I discovered this adaptation or invented that combination; but showed the whole thing as if the Divine Artificer had made it, and he had happened to find it. So modest he was about it, such a pleasant touch of respect was mingled with his quiet admiration of it, and so calmly convinced he was that it was established on irrefragable laws.

Not only that evening, but for several succeeding evenings, Clennam was quite charmed by this investigation. The more he pursued it, and the oftener he glanced at the gray head bending over it, and the shrewd eye kindling with pleasure in it and love of it — instrument for probing his heart though it had been made for twelve long years — the less he could reconcile it to his younger energy to let it go without one effort more. At length he said, —

"Doyce, it came to this at last — that the business was to be sunk with Heaven knows how many more wrecks, or begun all over again?"

"Yes," returned Doyce, "that's what the noblemen and gentlemen made of it after a dozen years."

"And pretty fellows, too!" said Clennam bitterly.

"The usual thing!" observed Doyce. "I must not make a martyr of myself, when I am one of so large a company."

"Relinquish it, or begin it all over again?" mused Clennam.

"That was exactly the long and the short of it," said Doyce.

"Then, my friend," cried Clennam, starting up, and taking his work-roughened hand, "it shall be begun all over again!"

Doyce looked alarmed, and replied, in a hurry — for him, "No, no. Better put it by. Far better put it by. It will be heard of one day. I can put it by. You forget, my good Clennam: I *have* put it by. It's all at an end."

"Yes, Doyce," returned Clennam, "at an end as far as your efforts and rebuffs are concerned, I admit, but not as far as mine are. I am younger than you; I have only once set foot in that precious office, and I am fresh game for them. Come! I'll try them. You shall do exactly as you have been doing since we have been together. I will add (as I easily can), to what I have been doing, the attempt to get public justice done to you; and, unless I have some success to report, you shall hear no more of it."

Daniel Doyce was still reluctant to consent, and again and again urged that they had better put it by. But it was natural that he should gradually allow himself to be over-persuaded by Clennam, and should yield. Yield he did. So Arthur resumed the long and hopeless labor of striving to make way with the Circumlocution Office.

The waiting-rooms of that Department soon began to be familiar with his presence, and he was gener-

ally ushered into them by its janitors much as a pickpocket might be shown into a police-office; the principal difference being that the object of the later class of public business is to keep the pickpocket, while the Circumlocution object was to get rid of Clennam. However, he was resolved to stick to the Great Department; and so the work of form-filling, corresponding, minuting, memorandum-making, signing, counter-signing, counter-counter-signing backwards and forwards, and referring sideways, crosswise, and zigzag, recommenced.

Here arises a feature of the Circumlocution Office not previously mentioned in the present record. When that admirable Department got into trouble, and was, by some infuriated member of Parliament, whom the smaller Barnacles almost suspected of laboring under diabolic possession, attacked, on the merits of no individual case, but as an Institution wholly abominable and Bedlamite; then the noble or right honorable Barnacle who represented it in the House would smite that member, and cleave him asunder, with a statement of the quantity of business (for the prevention of business) done by the Circumlocution Office. Then would that noble or right honorable Barnacle hold in his hand a paper containing a few figures, to which, with the permission of the House, he would entreat its attention. Then would the inferior Barnacles exclaim, obeying orders, "Hear, hear, hear!" and "Read!" Then would the noble or right honorable Barnacle perceive, sir, from this little document, which he thought might carry conviction even to the perversest mind (Derisive laughter and cheering from the Barnacle fry), that within the short compass of

the last financial half-year, this much-maligned Department (Cheers) had written and received fifteen thousand letters (Loud cheers), twenty-four thousand minutes (Louder cheers), and thirty-two thousand five hundred and seventeen memoranda (Vehement cheering). Nay, an ingenious gentleman connected with the Department, and himself a valuable public servant, had done him the favor to make a curious calculation of the amount of stationery consumed in it during the same period. It formed a part of this same short document; and he derived from it the remarkable fact, that the sheets of foolscap paper it had devoted to the public service would pave the footways on both sides of Oxford Street from end to end, and leave nearly a quarter of a mile to spare for the Park (Immense cheering and laughter); while of tape — red tape — it had used enough to stretch, in graceful festoons, from Hyde Park Corner to the General Post Office. Then, amidst a burst of official exultation, would the noble or right honorable Barnacle sit down, leaving the mutilated fragments of the member on the field. No one, after that exemplary demolition of him, would have the hardihood to hint that the more the Circumlocution Office did, the less was done, and that the greatest blessing it could confer on an unhappy public would be to do nothing.

With sufficient occupation on his hands, now that he had this additional task — such a task had many and many a serviceable man died of before his day — Arthur Clennam led a life of slight variety. Regular visits to his mother's dull sick-room, and visits scarcely less regular to Mr. Meagles at Twickenham, were its only changes during many months.

He sadly and sorely missed Little Dorrit. He had been prepared to miss her very much, but not so much. He knew to the full extent only through experience what a large place in his life was left blank when her familiar little figure went out of it. He felt, too, that he must relinquish the hope of its return, understanding the family character sufficiently well to be assured that he and she were divided by a broad ground of separation. The old interest he had had in her, and her old trusting reliance on him, were tinged with melancholy in his mind: so soon had change stolen over them, and so soon had they glided into the past with other secret tendernesses.

When he received her letter he was greatly moved, but did not the less sensibly feel that she was far divided from him by more than distance. It helped him to a clearer and keener perception of the place assigned him by the family. He saw that he was cherished in her grateful remembrance secretly, and that they resented him with the jail and the rest of its belongings.

Through all these meditations, which every day of his life crowded about her, he thought of her otherwise in the old way. She was his innocent friend, his delicate child, his dear Little Dorrit. This very change of circumstances fitted curiously in with the habit, begun on the night when the roses floated away, of considering himself as a much older man than his years really made him. He regarded her from a point of view which in its remoteness, tender as it was, he little thought would have been unspeakable agony to her. He speculated about her future destiny, and about the hus-

band she might have, with an affection for her which would have drained her heart of its dearest drop of hope, and broken it.

Everything about him tended to confirm him in the custom of looking on himself as an elderly man, from whom such aspirations as he had combated in the case of Minnie Gowan (though that was not so long ago either, reckoning by months and seasons) were finally departed. His relations with her father and mother were like those on which a widower son-in-law might have stood. If the twin sister, who was dead, had lived to pass away in the bloom of womanhood, and he had been her husband, the nature of his intercourse with Mr. and Mrs. Meagles would probably have been just what it was. This imperceptibly helped to render habitual the impression within him that he had done with, and dismissed, that part of life.

He invariably heard of Minnie from them, as telling them in her letters how happy she was, and how she loved her husband; but, inseparable from that subject, he invariably saw the old cloud on Mr. Meagles's face. Mr. Meagles had never been quite so radiant since the marriage as before. He had never quite recovered the separation from Pet. He was the same good-humored, open creature; but as if his face, from being much turned towards the pictures of his two children which could show him only one look, unconsciously adopted a characteristic from them, it always had now, through all its changes of expression, a look of loss in it.

One wintry Saturday, when Clennam was at the cottage, the Dowager Mrs. Gowan drove up, in the Hampton-Court equipage which pretended to be

the exclusive equipage of so many individual proprietors. She descended, in her shady ambuscade of green fan, to favor Mr. and Mrs. Meagles with a call.

"And how do you both do, Papa and Mamma Meagles?" said she, encouraging her humble connections. "And when did you last hear from or about my poor fellow?"

My poor fellow was her son; and this mode of speaking of him politely kept alive, without any offence in the world, the pretence that he had fallen a victim to the Meagles' wiles.

"And the dear pretty one?" said Mrs. Gowan. "Have you later news of her than I have?"

Which also delicately implied that her son had been captured by mere beauty, and under its fascination had foregone all sorts of worldly advantages.

"I am sure," said Mrs. Gowan, without straining her attention on the answers she received, "it's an unspeakable comfort to know they continue happy. My poor fellow is of such a restless disposition, and has been so used to roving about, and to being inconstant and popular among all manner of people, that it's the greatest comfort in life. I suppose they're as poor as mice, Papa Meagles?"

Mr. Meagles, fidgety under the question, replied, "I hope not, ma'am. I hope they will manage their little income."

"Oh! my dearest Meagles!" returned that lady, tapping him on the arm with the green fan, and then adroitly interposing it between a yawn and the company, "how can you, as a man of the world and one of the most business-like of human beings—

for you know you are business-like, and a great deal too much for us who are not" —

(Which went to the former purpose, by making Mr. Meagles out to be an artful schemer.)

"— How can you talk about their managing their little means? My poor dear fellow! The idea of his managing hundreds! And the sweet pretty creature, too! The notion of her managing! Papa Meagles! Don't!"

"Well, ma'am," said Mr. Meagles gravely, "I am sorry to admit, then, that Henry certainly does anticipate his means."

"My dear good man — I use no ceremony with you, because we are a kind of relations; — positively, Mamma Meagles," exclaimed Mrs. Gowan cheerfully, as if the absurd coincidence then flashed upon her for the first time, "a kind of relations! My dear good man, in this world none of us can have *everything* our own way."

This again went to the former point, and showed Mr. Meagles with all good-breeding that, so far, he had been brilliantly successful in his deep designs. Mrs. Gowan thought the hit so good a one, that she dwelt upon it; repeating, "Not *everything*. No, no; in this world we must not expect *everything*, Papa Meagles."

"And may I ask, ma'am," retorted Mr. Meagles, a little heightened in color, "who does expect everything?"

"Oh, nobody, nobody!" said Mrs. Gowan. "I was going to say — but you put me out. You interrupting Papa, what was I going to say?"

Dropping her large green fan, she looked musingly at Mr. Meagles while she thought about it; a

performance not tending to the coolness of that gentleman's rather heated spirits.

"Ah! Yes, to be sure!" said Mrs. Gowan. "You must remember that my poor fellow has always been accustomed to expectations. They may have been realized, or they may not have been realized" —

"Let us say, then, may not have been realized," observed Mr. Meagles.

The Dowager for a moment gave him an angry look; but tossed it off with her head and her fan, and pursued the tenor of her way in her former manner.

"It makes no difference. My poor fellow has been accustomed to that sort of thing, and of course you knew it, and were prepared for the consequences. I myself always clearly foresaw the consequences, and am not surprised. And you must not be surprised. In fact, can't be surprised. Must have been prepared for it."

Mr. Meagles looked at his wife, and at Clennam; bit his lip, and coughed.

"And now here's my poor fellow," Mrs. Gowan pursued, "receiving notice that he is to hold himself in expectation of a baby, and all the expenses attendant on such an addition to his family! Poor Henry! But it can't be helped now: it's too late to help it now. Only don't talk of anticipating means, Papa Meagles, as a discovery: because that would be too much."

"Too much, ma'am?" said Mr. Meagles, as seeking an explanation.

"There, there!" said Mrs. Gowan, putting him in his inferior place with an expressive action of

her hand. "Too much for my poor boy's mother to bear at this time of day. They are fast married, and can't be unmarried. There, there! I know that! You needn't tell me that, Papa Meagles. I know it very well. What was it I said just now? That it was a great comfort they continued happy. It is to be hoped they will still continue happy. It is to be hoped Pretty One will do everything she can to make my poor fellow happy, and keep him contented. Papa and Mamma Meagles, we had better say no more about it. We never did look at this subject from the same side, and we never shall. There, there! Now I am good."

Truly, having by this time said everything she could say in maintenance of her wonderfully mythical position, and in admonition to Mr. Meagles that he must not expect to bear his honors of alliance too cheaply, Mrs. Gowan was disposed to forego the rest. If Mr. Meagles had submitted to a glance of entreaty from Mrs. Meagles and an expressive gesture from Clennam, he would have left her in the undisturbed enjoyment of this state of mind. But Pet was the darling and pride of his heart; and if he could ever have championed her more devotedly, or loved her better, than in the days when she was the sunlight of his house, it would have been now, when, in its daily grace and delight, she was lost to it.

"Mrs. Gowan, ma'am," said Mr. Meagles, "I have been a plain man all my life. If I was to try — no matter whether on myself, on somebody else, or both, — any genteel mystifications, I should probably not succeed in them."

"Papa Meagles," returned the Dowager with an

affable smile, but with the bloom on her cheeks standing out a little more vividly than usual, as the neighboring surface became paler, "probably not."

"Therefore, my good madam," said Mr. Meagles, at great pains to restrain himself, "I hope I may, without offence, ask to have no such mystifications played off upon me."

"Mamma Meagles," observed Mrs. Gowan, "your good man is incomprehensible."

Her turning to that worthy lady was an artifice to bring her into the discussion, quarrel with her, and vanquish her. Mr. Meagles interposed to prevent that consummation.

"Mother," said he, "you are inexpert, my dear, and it is not a fair match. Let me beg of you to remain quiet. Come, Mrs. Gowan, come! Let us try to be sensible; let us try to be good-natured; let us try to be fair. Don't you pity Henry, and I won't pity Pet. And don't be one-sided, my dear madam; it's not considerate, it's not kind. Don't let us say that we hope Pet will make Henry happy, or even that we hope Henry will make Pet happy" (Mr. Meagles himself did not look happy as he spoke the words), "but let us hope they will make each other happy."

"Yes, sure, and there leave it, Father," said Mrs. Meagles the kind-hearted and comfortable.

"Why, Mother, no," returned Mr. Meagles, "not exactly there. I can't quite leave it there; I must say just half a dozen words more. Mrs. Gowan, I hope I am not over-sensitive. I believe I don't look it."

"Indeed you do not," said Mrs. Gowan, shaking her head and the great green fan together for emphasis.

"Thank you, ma'am; that's well. Notwithstanding which, I feel a little — I don't want to use a strong word — now, shall I say hurt?" asked Mr. Meagles at once with frankness and moderation, and with a conciliatory appeal in his tone.

"Say what you like," answered Mrs. Gowan. "It is perfectly indifferent to me."

"No, no, don't say that," urged Mr. Meagles, "because that's not responding amiably. I feel a little hurt when I hear references made to consequences having been foreseen, and to its being too late now, and so forth."

"*Do* you, Papa Meagles?" said Mrs. Gowan. "I am not surprised."

"Well, ma'am," reasoned Mr. Meagles, "I was in hopes you would have been at least surprised, because to hurt me wilfully on so tender a subject is surely not generous."

"I am not responsible," said Mrs. Gowan, "for your conscience, you know."

Poor Mr. Meagles looked aghast with astonishment.

"If I am unluckily obliged to carry a cap about with me which is yours, and fits you," pursued Mrs. Gowan, "don't blame *me* for its pattern, Papa Meagles, I beg!"

"Why, good Lord, ma'am!" Mr. Meagles broke out, "that's as much as to state" —

"Now, Papa Meagles, Papa Meagles," said Mrs. Gowan, who became extremely deliberate and prepossessing in manner whenever that gentleman became at all warm, "perhaps, to prevent confusion, I had better speak for myself than trouble your kindness to speak for me. It's as much as to state,

you begin. If you please, I will finish the sentence. It is as much as to state — not that I wish to press it, or even recall it, for it is of no use now, and my only wish is to make the best of existing circumstances — that from the first to the last I always objected to this match of yours, and at a very late period yielded a most unwilling consent to it."

"Mother!" cried Mr. Meagles. "Do you hear this? Arthur! Do you hear this?"

"The room being of a convenient size," said Mrs. Gowan, looking about as she fanned herself, "and quite charmingly adapted in all respects to conversation, I should imagine that I am audible in any part of it."

Some moments passed in silence before Mr. Meagles could hold himself in his chair with sufficient security to prevent his breaking out of it at the next word he spoke. At last he said: "Ma'am, I am very unwilling to revive them, but I must remind you what my opinions and my course were, all along, on that unfortunate subject."

"Oh, my dear sir!" said Mrs. Gowan, smiling and shaking her head with accusatory intelligence, "they were well understood by me, I assure you."

"I never, ma'am," said Mr. Meagles, "knew unhappiness before that time; I never knew anxiety before that time. It was a time of such distress to me, that" — That Mr. Meagles really could say no more about it, in short, but passed his handkerchief before his face.

"I understood the whole affair," said Mrs. Gowan, composedly looking over her fan. "As you have appealed to Mr. Clennam, I may appeal to Mr. Clennam too. He knows whether I did or not."

"I am very unwilling," said Clennam, looked to by all parties, "to take any share in this discussion, more especially because I wish to preserve the best understanding and the clearest relations with Mr. Henry Gowan. I have very strong reasons indeed for entertaining that wish. Mrs. Gowan attributed certain views of furthering the marriage to my friend here, in conversation with me before it took place; and I endeavored to undeceive her. I represented that I knew him (as I did and do) to be strenuously opposed to it, both in opinion and action."

"You see?" said Mrs. Gowan, turning the palms of her hands towards Mr. Meagles, as if she were Justice herself, representing to him that he had better confess, for he had not a leg to stand on. "You see? Very good! Now, Papa and Mamma Meagles both!" here she rose; "allow me to take the liberty of putting an end to this rather formidable controversy. I will not say another word upon its merits. I will only say that it is an additional proof of what one knows from all experience; that this kind of thing never answers — as my poor fellow himself would say, that it never pays — in one word, that it never does."

Mr. Meagles asked, what kind of thing?

"It is in vain," said Mrs. Gowan, "for people to attempt to get on together who have such extremely different antecedents; who are jumbled against each other in this accidental, matrimonial sort of way; and who cannot look at the untoward circumstance which has shaken them together in the same light. It never does."

Mr. Meagles was beginning, "Permit me to say, ma'am" —

"No, don't!" returned Mrs. Gowan. "Why should you? It is an ascertained fact. It never does. I will therefore, if you please, go my way, leaving you to yours. I shall at all times be happy to receive my poor fellow's pretty wife, and I shall always make a point of being on the most affectionate terms with her. But as to these terms, semi-family and semi-stranger, semi-goring and semi-boring, they form a state of things quite amusing in its impracticability. I assure you it never does."

The Dowager here made a smiling obeisance, rather to the room than any one in it, and therewith took a final farewell of Papa and Mamma Meagles. Clennam stepped forward to hand her to the Pill-Box, which was at the service of all the Pills in Hampton-Court Palace; and she got into that vehicle with distinguished serenity, and was driven away.

Thenceforth the Dowager, with a light and careless humor, often recounted to her particular acquaintance how, after a hard trial, she had found it impossible to know those people who belonged to Henry's wife, and who had made that desperate set to catch him. Whether she had come to the conclusion beforehand, that to get rid of them would give her favorite pretence a better air, might save her some occasional inconvenience, and could risk no loss (the pretty creature being fast married, and her father devoted to her), was best known to herself. Though this history has its opinion on that point too, and decidedly in the affirmative.

CHAPTER IX.

APPEARANCE AND DISAPPEARANCE.

"ARTHUR, my dear boy," said Mr. Meagles on the evening of the following day, "Mother and I have been talking this over, and we don't feel comfortable in remaining as we are. That elegant connection of ours — that dear lady who was here yesterday" —

"I understand," said Arthur.

"Even that affable and condescending ornament to society," pursued Mr. Meagles, "may misrepresent us, we are afraid. We could bear a great deal, Arthur, for her sake; but we think we would rather not bear that, if it was all the same to her."

"Good," said Arthur. "Go on."

"You see," proceeded Mr. Meagles, "it might put us wrong with our son-in-law, it might even put us wrong with our daughter, and it might lead to a great deal of domestic trouble. You see, don't you?"

"Yes, indeed," returned Arthur, "there is much reason in what you say." He had glanced at Mrs. Meagles, who was always on the good and sensible side; and a petition had shone out of her honest face that he would support Mr. Meagles in his present inclinings.

"So we are very much disposed, are Mother and I," said Mr. Meagles, "to pack up bag and baggage, and go among the Allongers and Marshongers once more. I mean, we are very much disposed to be off, strike right through France into Italy, and see our Pet."

"And I don't think," replied Arthur, touched by the motherly anticipation in the bright face of Mrs. Meagles (she must have been very like her daughter once), "that you could do better. And if you ask me for my advice, it is that you set off to-morrow."

"Is it really, though?" said Mr. Meagles. "Mother, this is being backed in an idea?"

Mother, with a look which thanked Clennam in a manner very agreeable to him, answered that it was indeed.

"The fact is, besides, Arthur," said Mr. Meagles, the old cloud coming over his face, "that my son-in-law is already in debt again, and that I suppose I must clear him again. It may be as well, even on this account, that I should step over there, and look him up in a friendly way. Then, again, here's Mother foolishly anxious (and yet naturally too) about Pet's state of health, and that she should not be left to feel lonesome at the present time. It's undeniably a long way off, Arthur, and a strange place for the poor love under all the circumstances. Let her be as well cared for as any lady in that land, still it is a long way off. Just as Home is Home, though it's never so Homely, why, you see," said Mr. Meagles, adding a new version to the proverb, "Rome is Rome, though it's never so Romely."

"All perfectly true," observed Arthur, "and all sufficient reasons for going."

"I am glad you think so; it decides me. Mother, my dear, you may get ready. We have lost our pleasant interpreter (she spoke three foreign languages beautifully, Arthur; you have heard her many a time), and you must pull me through it, Mother, as well as you can. I require a deal of pulling through, Arthur," said Mr. Meagles, shaking his head, "a deal of pulling through. I stick at everything beyond a noun-substantive, — and I stick at him, if he's at all a tight one."

"Now I think of it," returned Clennam, "there's Cavalletto. He shall go with you if you like. I could not afford to lose him, but you will bring him safe back."

"Well! I am much obliged to you, my boy," said Mr. Meagles, turning it over, "but I think not. No, I think I'll be pulled through by Mother. Caval-looro (I stick at his very name to start with, and it sounds like the chorus to a comic song) is so necessary to you, that I don't like the thought of taking him away. More than that, there's no saying when we may come home again; and it would never do to take him away for an indefinite time. The cottage is not what it was. It only holds two little people less than it ever did. Pet and her poor unfortunate maid Tattycoram; but it seems empty now. Once out of it, there's no knowing when we may come back to it. No, Arthur, I'll be pulled through by Mother."

They would do best by themselves, perhaps, after all, Clennam thought; therefore did not press his proposal.

"If you would come down and stay here for a change, when it wouldn't trouble you," Mr. Meagles

resumed, "I should be glad to think—and so would Mother too, I know—that you were brightening up the old place with a bit of life it was used to when it was full, and that the Babies on the wall there had a kind eye upon them sometimes. You so belong to the spot, and to them, Arthur, and we should every one of us have been so happy if it had fallen out— But, let us see—how's the weather for travelling, now?" Mr. Meagles broke off, cleared his throat, and got up to look out of window.

They agreed that the weather was of high promise; and Clennam kept the talk in that safe direction until it had become easy again, when he gently diverted it to Henry Gowan, and his quick sense and agreeable qualities when he was delicately dealt with; he likewise dwelt on the indisputable affection he entertained for his wife. Clennam did not fail of his effect upon good Mr. Meagles, whom these commendations greatly cheered; and who took Mother to witness that the single and cordial desire of his heart, in reference to their daughter's husband, was harmoniously to exchange friendship for friendship, and confidence for confidence. Within a few hours the cottage furniture began to be wrapped up for preservation in the family absence—or, as Mr. Meagles expressed it, the house began to put its hair in papers—and within a few days Father and Mother were gone, Mrs. Tickit and Doctor Buchan were posted, as of yore, behind the parlor blind, and Arthur's solitary feet were rustling among the dry fallen leaves in the garden walks.

As he had a liking for the spot, he seldom let a week pass without paying it a visit. Sometimes he went down alone from Saturday to Monday: some-

times his partner accompanied him; sometimes he merely strolled for an hour or two about the house and garden, saw that all was right, and returned to London again. At all times, and under all circumstances, Mrs. Tickit, with her dark row of curls, and Doctor Buchan, sat in the parlor window, looking out for the family return.

On one of his visits Mrs. Tickit received him with the words, "I have something to tell you, Mr. Clennam, that will surprise you." So surprising was the something in question, that it actually brought Mrs. Tickit out of the parlor window, and produced her in the garden walk, when Clennam went in at the gate on its being opened for him.

"What is it, Mrs. Tickit?" said he.

"Sir," returned that faithful housekeeper, having taken him into the parlor and closed the door, "if ever I saw the led-away and deluded child in my life, I saw her identically in the dusk of yesterday evening."

"You don't mean Tatty—"

"Coram, yes, I do!" quoth Mrs. Ticket, clearing the disclosure at a leap.

"Where?"

"Mr. Clennam," returned Mrs. Tickit, "I was a little heavy in my eyes, being that I was waiting longer than customary for my cup of tea, which was then preparing by Mary Jane. I was not sleeping, nor what a person would term, correctly, dozing. I was more what a person would strictly call watching with my eyes closed."

Without entering upon any inquiry into this curious abnormal condition, Clennam said, "Exactly. Well?"

"Well, sir," proceeded Mrs. Tickit, "I was thinking of one thing and thinking of another. Just as you yourself might. Just as anybody might."

"Precisely so," said Clennam. "Well?"

"And when I do think of one thing and do think of another," pursued Mrs. Tickit, "I hardly need to tell you, Mr. Clennam, that I think of the family. Because, dear me! a person's thoughts," Mrs. Tickit said this with an argumentative and philosophic air, "however they may stray, will go more or less on what is uppermost in their minds. They *will* do it, sir, and a person can't prevent them."

Arthur subscribed to this discovery with a nod.

"You find it so yourself, sir, I'll be bold to say," said Mrs. Tickit, "and we all find it so. It ain't our stations in life that changes us, Mr. Clennam; thoughts is free! — As I was saying, I was thinking of one thing and thinking of another, and thinking very much of the family. Not of the family in the present times only, but in the past times too. For when a person does begin thinking of one thing and thinking of another, in that manner as it's getting dark, what I say is that all times seem to be present, and a person must get out of that state and consider before they can say which is which."

He nodded again; afraid to utter a word lest it should present any new opening to Mrs. Tickit's conversational powers.

"In consequence of which," said Mrs. Tickit, "when I quivered my eyes, and saw her actual form and figure looking in at the gate, I let them close again without so much as starting; for that actual form and figure came so pat to the time when it belonged to the house as much as mine or your own,

that I never thought at the moment of its having gone away. But, sir, when I quivered my eyes again, and saw that it wasn't there, then it all flooded upon me with a fright, and I jumped up."

"You ran out directly?" said Clennam.

"I ran out," assented Mrs. Tickit, "as fast as ever my feet could carry me; and if you'll credit it, Mr. Clennam, there wasn't in the whole shining Heavens, no, not so much as a finger of that young woman."

Passing over the absence from the firmament of this novel constellation, Arthur inquired of Mrs. Tickit if she herself went beyond the gate?

"Went to and fro, and high and low," said Mrs. Tickit, "and saw no sign of her."

He then asked Mrs. Tickit how long a space of time she supposed there might have been between the two sets of ocular quiverings she had experienced? Mrs. Tickit, though minutely circumstantial in her reply, had no settled opinion between five seconds and ten minutes. She was so plainly at sea on this part of the case, and had so clearly been startled out of slumber, that Clennam was much disposed to regard the appearance as a dream. Without hurting Mrs. Tickit's feelings with that infidel solution of her mystery, he took it away from the cottage with him; and probably would have retained it ever afterwards, if a circumstance had not soon happened to change his opinion.

He was passing at nightfall along the Strand, and the lamplighter was going on before him, under whose hand the street lamps, blurred by the foggy air, burst out one after another, like so many blazing sunflowers coming into full blow all at once, when

a stoppage on the pavement, caused by a train of coal-wagons toiling up from the wharves at the riverside, brought him to a stand-still. He had been walking quickly, and going with some current of thought, and the sudden check given to both operations caused him to look freshly about him, as people under such circumstances usually do.

Immediately, he saw in advance — a few people intervening, but still so near to him that he could have touched them by stretching out his arm — Tattycoram and a strange man of a remarkable appearance: a swaggering man, with a high nose, and a black mustache as false in its color as his eyes were false in their expression, who wore his heavy cloak with the air of a foreigner. His dress and general appearance were those of a man on travel, and he seemed to have very recently joined the girl. In bending down (being much taller than she was), listening to whatever she said to him, he looked over his shoulder with the suspicious glance of one who was not unused to be mistrustful that his footsteps might be dogged. It was then that Clennam saw his face, as his eyes lowered on the people behind him in the aggregate, without particularly resting upon Clennam's face or any other.

He had scarcely turned his head about again, and it was still bent down, listening to the girl, when the stoppage ceased, and the obstructed stream of people flowed on. Still bending his head and listening to the girl, he went on at her side, and Clennam followed them, resolved to play this unexpected play out, and see where they went.

He had hardly made the determination (though he was not long about it), when he was again as

suddenly brought up as he had been by the stoppage. They turned short into the Adelphi, — the girl evidently leading, — and went straight on, as if they were going to the terrace which overhangs the river.

There is always, to this day, a sudden pause in that place to the roar of the great thoroughfare. The many sounds become so deadened that the change is like putting cotton in the ears, or having the head thickly muffled. At that time the contrast was far greater; there being no small steamboats on the river, no landing-places but slippery wooden stairs and foot-causeways, no railroad on the opposite bank, no hanging bridge or fish-market near at hand, no traffic on the nearest bridge of stone, nothing moving on the stream but watermen's wherries and coal-lighters. Long and broad black tiers of the latter, moored fast in the mud as if they were never to move again, made the shore funereal and silent after dark; and kept what little water movement there was far out towards mid-stream. At any hour later than sunset, and not least at that hour when most of the people who have anything to eat at home are going home to eat it, and when most of those who have nothing have hardly yet slunk out to beg or steal, it was a deserted place, and looked on a deserted scene.

Such was the hour when Clennam stopped at the corner, observing the girl and the strange man as they went down the street. The man's footsteps were so noisy on the echoing stones that he was unwilling to add the sound of his own. But, when they had passed the turning, and were in the darkness of the dark corner leading to the terrace, he made after them with such indifferent appearance

of being a casual passenger on his way as he could assume.

When he rounded the dark corner, they were walking along the terrace, towards a figure which was coming towards them. If he had seen it by itself, under such conditions of gas-lamp, mist, and distance, he might not have known it at first sight; but, with the figure of the girl to prompt him, he at once recognized Miss Wade.

He stopped at the corner, seeming to look back expectantly up the street, as if he had made an appointment with some one to meet him there; but he kept a careful eye on the three. When they came together, the man took off his hat, and made Miss Wade a bow. The girl appeared to say a few words as though she presented him, or accounted for his being late, or early, or what not; and then fell a pace or so behind by herself. Miss Wade and the man then began to walk up and down; the man having the appearance of being extremely courteous and complimentary in manner; Miss Wade having the appearance of being extremely haughty.

When they came down to the corner and turned, she was saying, "If I pinch myself for it, sir, that is my business. Confine yourself to yours, and ask me no question."

"By Heaven, ma'am!" he replied, making her another bow. "It was my profound respect for the strength of your character, and my admiration of your beauty."

"I want neither the one nor the other from any one," said she, "and certainly not from you of all creatures. Go on with your report."

"Am I pardoned?" he asked with an air of half-abashed gallantry.

"You are paid," she said, "and that is all you want."

Whether the girl hung behind because she was not to hear the business, or as already knowing enough about it, Clennam could not determine. They turned and she turned. She looked away at the river as she walked with her hands folded before her; and that was all he could make of her without showing his face. There happened, by good fortune, to be a lounger really waiting for some one; and he sometimes looked over the railing at the water, and sometimes came to the dark corner and looked up the street, rendering Arthur less conspicuous.

When Miss Wade and the man came back again she was saying, "You must wait until to-morrow."

"A thousand pardons!" he returned. "My faith! Then it's not convenient to-night?"

"No. I tell you I must get it before I can give it to you."

She stopped in the roadway, as if to put an end to the conference. He of course stopped too. And the girl stopped.

"It's a little inconvenient," said the man. "A little. But, holy blue! that's nothing in such a service. I am without money to-night by chance. I *have* a good banker in this city, but I would not wish to draw upon the house until the time when I shall draw for a round sum."

"Harriet," said Miss Wade, "arrange with him — this gentleman here — for sending him some money to-morrow." She said it with a slur of the word "gentleman" which was more contemptuous than any emphasis, and walked slowly on.

The man bent his head again, and the girl spoke to him as they both followed her. Clennam ventured to look at the girl as they moved away. He could note that her rich black eyes were fastened upon the man with a scrutinizing expression, and that she kept at a little distance from him, as they walked side by side to the further end of the terrace.

A loud and altered clank upon the pavement warned him, before he could discern what was passing there, that the man was coming back alone. Clennam lounged into the road, towards the railing; and the man passed at a quick swing, with the end of his cloak thrown over his shoulder, singing a scrap of a French song.

The whole vista had no one in it now but himself. The lounger had lounged out of view, and Miss Wade and Tattycoram were gone. More than ever bent on seeing what became of them, and on having some information to give his good friend Mr. Meagles, he went out at the further end of the terrace, looking cautiously about him. He rightly judged that, at first at all events, they would go in a contrary direction from their late companion. He soon saw them in a neighboring by-street, which was not a thoroughfare, evidently allowing time for the man to get well out of their way. They walked leisurely arm in arm down one side of the street, and returned on the opposite side. When they came back to the street corner, they changed their pace for the pace of people with an object and a distance before them, and walked steadily away. Clennam, no less steadily, kept them in sight.

They crossed the Strand, and passed through

Covent Garden (under the windows of his old lodging, where dear Little Dorrit had come that night) and slanted away north-east, until they passed the great building whence Tattycoram derived her name, and turned into the Gray's Inn Road. Clennam was quite at home here, in right of Flora, not to mention the Patriarch and Pancks, and kept them in view with ease. He was beginning to wonder where they might be going next, when that wonder was lost in the greater wonder with which he saw them turn into the Patriarchal street. That wonder was in its turn swallowed up in the greater wonder with which he saw them stop at the Patriarchal door. A low double knock at the bright brass knocker, a gleam of light into the road from the opened door, a brief pause for inquiry and answer, and the door was shut, and they were housed.

After looking at the surrounding objects for assurance that he was not in an odd dream, and after pacing a little while before the house, Arthur knocked at the door. It was opened by the usual maid-servant, and she showed him up at once, with her usual alacrity, to Flora's sitting-room.

There was no one with Flora but Mr. F.'s Aunt, which respectable gentlewoman, basking in a balmy atmosphere of tea and toast, was ensconced in an easy-chair by the fireside, with a little table at her elbow, and a clean white handkerchief spread over her lap, on which two pieces of toast at that moment awaited consumption. Bending over a steaming vessel of tea, and looking through the steam, and breathing forth the steam, like a malignant Chinese enchantress engaged in the performance of

unholy rites, Mr. F.'s Aunt put down her great teacup and exclaimed, "Drat him, if he ain't come back again!"

It would seem, from the foregoing exclamation, that this uncompromising relative of the lamented Mr. F., measuring time by the acuteness of her sensations, and not by the clock, supposed Clennam to have lately gone away; whereas at least a quarter of a year had elapsed since he had had the temerity to present himself before her.

"My goodness, Arthur!" cried Flora, rising to give him a cordial reception, "Doyce and Clennam what a start and a surprise for though not far from the machinery and foundry business and surely might be taken sometimes if at no other time about mid-day when a glass of sherry and a humble sandwich of whatever cold meat in the larder might not come amiss nor taste the worse for being friendly for you know you buy it somewhere and wherever bought a profit must be made or they would never keep the place it stands to reason without a motive still never seen and learnt now not to be expected, for as Mr. F. himself said if seeing is believing not seeing is believing too and when you don't see you may fully believe you're not remembered not that I expect you Arthur Doyce and Clennam to remember me why should I for the days are gone but bring another teacup here directly and tell her fresh toast and pray sit near the fire."

Arthur was in the greatest anxiety to explain the object of his visit; but was put off for the moment, in spite of himself, by what he understood of the reproachful purport of these words, and by the genuine pleasure she testified in seeing him.

"And now pray tell me something all you know," said Flora, drawing her chair near to his, "about the good dear quiet little thing and all the changes of her fortunes carriage people now no doubt and horses without number most romantic, a coat-of-arms of course and wild beasts on their hind-legs showing it as if it was a copy they had done with mouths from ear to ear good gracious, and has she her health which is the first consideration after all for what is wealth without it Mr. F. himself so often saying when his twinges came that sixpence a day and find yourself and no gout so much preferable, not that he could have lived on anything like it being the last man or that the precious little thing though far too familiar an expression now had any tendency of that sort much too slight and small but looked so fragile bless her!"

Mr. F.'s Aunt, who had eaten a piece of toast down to the crust, here solemnly handed the crust to Flora, who ate it for her as a matter of business. Mr. F.'s Aunt then moistened her ten fingers in slow succession at her lips, and wiped them in exactly the same order on the white handkerchief; then took the other piece of toast, and fell to work upon it. While pursuing this routine, she looked at Clennam with an expression of such intense severity that he felt obliged to look at her in return, against his personal inclinations.

"She is in Italy, with all her family, Flora," he said when the dread lady was occupied again.

"In Italy is she really?" said Flora, "with the grapes and figs growing everywhere and lava necklaces and bracelets too that land of poetry with burning mountains picturesque beyond belief though

if the organ-boys come away from the neighborhood not to be scorched nobody can wonder being so young and bringing their white mice with them most humane, and is she really in that favored land with nothing but blue about her and dying gladiators and Belvederas though Mr. F. himself did not believe for his objection when in spirits was that the images could not be true there being no medium between expensive quantities of linen badly got up and all in creases and none whatever, which certainly does not seem probable though perhaps in consequence of the extremes of rich and poor which may account for it."

Arthur tried to edge a word in, but Flora hurried on again.

"Venice Preserved too," said she, "I think you have been there is it well or ill preserved for people differ so and Macaroni if they really eat it like the conjurers why not cut it shorter, you are acquainted Arthur — dear Doyce and Clennam at least not dear and most assuredly not Doyce for I have not the pleasure but pray excuse me — acquainted I believe with Mantua what *has* it got to do with Mantua-making for I never have been able to conceive?"

"I believe there is no connection, Flora, between the two," Arthur was beginning, when she caught him up again.

"Upon your word no isn't there I never did but that's like me I run away with an idea and having none to spare I keep it, alas there was a time dear Arthur that is to say decidedly not dear nor Arthur neither but you understand me when one bright idea gilded the what's-his-name horizon of et cetera but it is darkly clouded now and all is over."

Arthur's increasing wish to speak of something very different was by this time so plainly written on his face, that Flora stopped in a tender look, and asked him what it was?

"I have the greatest desire, Flora, to speak to some one who is now in this house — with Mr. Casby, no doubt. Some one whom I saw come in, and who, in a misguided and deplorable way, has deserted the house of a friend of mine."

"Papa sees so many and such odd people," said Flora, rising, "that I shouldn't venture to go down for any one but you Arthur but for you I would willingly go down in a diving-bell much more a dining-room and will come back directly if you'll mind and at the same time *not* mind Mr. F.'s Aunt while I'm gone."

With those words and a parting glance, Flora bustled out, leaving Clennam under dreadful apprehensions of his terrible charge.

The first variation which manifested itself in Mr. F.'s Aunt's demeanor, when she had finished her piece of toast, was a loud and prolonged sniff. Finding it impossible to avoid construing this demonstration into a defiance of himself, its gloomy significance being unmistakable, Clennam looked plaintively at the excellent though prejudiced lady from whom it emanated, in the hope that she might be disarmed by a meek submission.

"None of your eyes at me," said Mr. F.'s Aunt, shivering with hostility. "Take that."

"That" was the crust of the piece of toast. Clennam accepted the boon with a look of gratitude, and held it in his hand under the pressure of a little embarrassment, which was not relieved

when Mr. F.'s Aunt, elevating her voice into a cry of considerable power, exclaimed, "He has a proud stomach, this chap! He's too proud a chap to eat it!" and, coming out of her chair, shook her venerable fist so very close to his nose as to tickle the surface. But for the timely return of Flora, to find him in this difficult situation, further consequences might have ensued. Flora, without the least discomposure or surprise, but congratulating the old lady in an approving manner on being "very lively to-night," handed her back to her chair.

"He has a proud stomach, this chap," said Mr. F.'s relation on being reseated. "Give him a meal of chaff!"

"Oh! I don't think he would like that, aunt," returned Flora.

"Give him a meal of chaff, I tell you," said Mr. F.'s Aunt, glaring round Flora on her enemy. "It's the only thing for a proud stomach. Let him eat it up every morsel. Drat him, give him a meal of chaff!"

Under a general pretence of helping him to this refreshment, Flora got him out on the staircase; Mr. F.'s Aunt even then constantly reiterating, with inexpressible bitterness, that he was "a chap," and had "a proud stomach," and over and over again insisting on that equine provision being made for him which she had already so strongly prescribed.

"Such an inconvenient staircase and so many corner stairs Arthur," whispered Flora, "would you object to putting your arm round me under my pelerine?"

With a sense of going down-stairs in a highly

ridiculous manner, Clennam descended in the required attitude, and only released his fair burden at the dining-room door; indeed, even there she was rather difficult to get rid of, remaining in his embrace to murmur, "Arthur, for mercy's sake don't breathe it to papa!"

She accompanied Arthur into the room, where the Patriarch sat alone, with his list shoes on the fender, twirling his thumbs as if he had never left off. The youthful Patriarch, aged ten, looked out of his picture-frame above him, with no calmer air than he. Both smooth heads were alike beaming, blundering, and bumpy.

"Mr. Clennam, I am glad to see you. I hope you are well, sir, I hope you are well. Please to sit down, please to sit down."

"I had hoped, sir," said Clennam, doing so, and looking round with a face of blank disappointment, "not to find you alone."

"Ah, indeed?" said the Patriarch sweetly. "Ah, indeed!"

"I told you so you know papa," cried Flora.

"Ah, to be sure!" returned the Patriarch. "Yes, just so. Ah, to be sure!"

"Pray, sir," demanded Clennam anxiously, "is Miss Wade gone?"

"Miss ——? Oh! you call her Wade," returned Mr. Casby. "Highly proper."

Arthur quickly returned, "What do you call her?"

"Wade," said Mr. Casby. "Oh! always Wade."

After looking at the philanthropic visage, and the long silky white hair, for a few seconds, during which Mr. Casby twirled his thumbs, and smiled at

the fire as if he were benevolently wishing it to burn him that he might forgive it, Arthur began,—

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Casby"—

"Not so, not so," said the Patriarch, "not so."

"—But, Miss Wade had an attendant with her—a young woman brought up by friends of mine, over whom her influence is not considered very salutary, and to whom I should be glad to have the opportunity of giving the assurance that she has not yet forfeited the interest of those protectors."

"Really, really?" returned the Patriarch.

"Will you, therefore, be so good as to give me the address of Miss Wade?"

"Dear, dear, dear!" said the Patriarch, "how very unfortunate! If you had only sent in to me when they were here! I observed the young woman, Mr. Clennam. A fine full-colored young woman, Mr. Clennam, with very dark hair and very dark eyes. If I mistake not, if I mistake not?"

Arthur assented, and said once more, with new expression, "If you will be so good as to give me the address."

"Dear, dear, dear!" exclaimed the Patriarch in sweet regret. "Tut, tut, tut! what a pity, what a pity! I have no address, sir. Miss Wade mostly lives abroad, Mr. Clennam. She has done so for some years, and she is (if I may say so of a fellow-creature and a lady) fitful and uncertain to a fault, Mr. Clennam. I may not see her again for a long, long time. I may never see her again. What a pity, what a pity!"

Clennam saw, now, that he had as much hope of getting assistance out of the Portrait as out of the Patriarch; but he said nevertheless,—

"Mr. Casby, could you, for the satisfaction of the friends I have mentioned, and under any obligation of secrecy that you may consider it your duty to impose, give me any information at all touching Miss Wade? I have seen her abroad, and I have seen her at home, but I know nothing of her. Could you give me any account of her whatever?"

"None," returned the Patriarch, shaking his big head with his utmost benevolence. "None at all. Dear, dear, dear! What a real pity that she stayed so short a time, and you delayed! As confidential agency business, agency business, I have occasionally paid this lady money; but what satisfaction is it to you, sir, to know that?"

"Truly, none at all," said Clennam.

"Truly," assented the Patriarch with a shining face as he philanthropically smiled at the fire, "none at all, sir. You hit the wise answer, Mr. Clennam. Truly, none at all, sir."

His turning of his smooth thumbs over one another as he sat there was so typical to Clennam of the way in which he would make the subject revolve if it were pursued, never showing any new part of it, nor allowing it to make the smallest advance, that it did much to help to convince him of his labor having been in vain. He might have taken any time to think about it, for Mr. Casby, well accustomed to get on anywhere by leaving everything to his bumps and his white hair, knew his strength to lie in silence. So there Casby sat, twirling and twirling, and making his polished head and forehead look largely benevolent in every knob.

With this spectacle before him, Arthur had risen

to go, when, from the inner Dock where the good ship Pancks was hove down when out in no cruising ground, the noise was heard of that steamer laboring towards them. It struck Arthur that the noise began demonstratively far off, as though Mr. Pancks sought to impress on any one who might happen to think about it that he was working on from out of hearing.

Mr. Pancks and he shook hands, and the former brought his employer a letter or two to sign. Mr. Pancks in shaking hands merely scratched his eyebrow with his left forefinger and snorted once, but Clennam, who understood him better now than of old, comprehended that he had almost done for the evening, and wished to say a word to him outside. Therefore, when he had taken his leave of Mr. Casby, and (which was a more difficult process) of Flora, he sauntered in the neighborhood on Mr. Pancks's line of road.

He had waited but a short time when Mr. Pancks appeared. Mr. Pancks shakes hands again with another expressive snort, and taking off his hat to put his hair up, Arthur thought he received his cue to speak to him as one who knew pretty well what had just now passed. Therefore he said, without any preface, —

"I suppose they were really gone, Pancks?"

"Yes," replied Pancks. "They were really gone."

"Does he know where to find that lady?"

"Can't say. I should think so."

Mr. Pancks did not? No, Mr. Pancks did not. Did Mr. Pancks know anything about her?

"I expect," rejoined that worthy, "I know as

much about her as she knows about herself. She is somebody's child — anybody's — nobody's. Put her in a room in London here with any six people old enough to be her parents, and her parents may be there for anything she knows. They may be in any house she sees, they may be in any churchyard she passes, she may run against them in any street, she may make chance acquaintances of 'em at any time; and never know it. She knows nothing about 'em. She knows nothing about any relative whatever. Never did. Never will."

"Mr. Casby could enlighten her, perhaps?"

"Maybe," said Pancks. "I expect so, but don't know. He has long had money (not overmuch, as I make out) in trust to dole out to her when she can't do without it. Sometimes she's proud, and won't touch it for a length of time; sometimes she's so poor, that she must have it. She writhes under her life. A woman more angry, passionate, reckless, and revengeful never lived. She came for money to-night. Said she had peculiar occasion for it."

"I think," observed Clennam, musing, "I by chance know what occasion — I mean into whose pocket the money is to go."

"Indeed?" said Pancks. "If it's a compact, I'd recommend that party to be exact in it. I wouldn't trust myself to that woman, young and handsome as she is, if I had wronged her; no, not for twice my proprietor's money! Unless," Pancks added as a saving clause, "I had a lingering illness on me, and wanted to get it over."

Arthur, hurriedly reviewing his own observation of her, found it to tally pretty nearly with Mr. Pancks's view.

"The wonder is to me," pursued Pancks, "that she has never done for my proprietor, as the only person connected with her story she can lay hold of. Mentioning that, I may tell you, between ourselves, that I am sometimes tempted to do for him myself.'

Arthur started and said, "Dear me, Pancks, don't say that!"

"Understand me," said Pancks, extending five cropped coaly finger-nails on Arthur's arm; "I don't mean cut his throat. But, by all that's precious, if he goes too far, I'll cut his hair!"

Having exhibited himself in the new light of enunciating this tremendous threat, Mr. Pancks, with a countenance of grave import, snorted several times and steamed away.

CHAPTER X.

THE DREAMS OF MRS. FLINTWINCH THICKEN.

THE shady waiting-rooms of the Circumlocution Office, where he passed a good deal of time in company with various troublesome convicts who were under sentence to be broken alive on that wheel, had afforded Arthur Clennam ample leisure, in three or four successive days, to exhaust the subject of his late glimpse of Miss Wade and Tattycoram. He had been able to make no more of it, and no less of it, and in this unsatisfactory condition he was fain to leave it.

During this space he had not been to his mother's dismal old house. One of his customary evenings for repairing thither now coming round, he left his dwelling and his partner at nearly nine o'clock, and slowly walked in the direction of that grim home of his youth.

It always affected his imagination as wrathful, mysterious, and sad; and his imagination was sufficiently impressible to see the whole neighborhood under some dark tinge of its dark shadow. As he went along, upon a dreary night, the dim streets by which he went seemed all depositories of oppressive secrets. The deserted counting-houses,

with their secrets of books and papers locked up in chests and safes; the banking-houses, with their secrets of strong rooms and wells, the keys of which were in a very few secret pockets and a very few secret breasts; the secrets of all the dispersed grinders in the vast mill, among whom there were doubtless plunderers, forgers, and trust betrayers of many sorts, whom the light of any day that dawned might reveal; he could have fancied that these things, in hiding, imparted a heaviness to the air. The shadow thickening and thickening as he approached its source, he thought of the secrets of the lonely church vaults, where the people who had hoarded and secreted in iron coffers were in their turn similarly hoarded, not yet at rest from doing harm; and then of the secrets of the river, as it rolled its turbid tide between two frowning wildernesses of secrets, extending thick and dense for many miles, and warding off the free air and the free country swept by winds and wings of birds.

The shadow still darkening as he drew near the house, the melancholy room which his father had once occupied, haunted by the appealing face he had himself seen fade away with him when there was no other watcher by the bed, arose before his mind. Its close air was secret. The gloom, and must, and dust of the whole tenement were secret. At the heart of it his mother presided, inflexible of face, indomitable of will, firmly holding all the secrets of her own and his father's life, and austerely opposing herself, front to front, to the great final secret of all life.

He had turned into the narrow and steep street from which the court or enclosure wherein the house

stood opened, when another footstep turned into it behind him, and so close upon his own that he was jostled to the wall. As his mind was teeming with these thoughts, the encounter took him altogether unprepared, so that the other passenger had had time to say boisterously, "Pardon! Not my fault!" and to pass on before the instant had elapsed which was requisite to his recovery of the realities about him.

When that moment had flashed away, he saw that the man striding on before him was the man who had been so much in his mind during the last few days. It was no casual resemblance, helped out by the force of the impression the man made upon him. It was the man; the man he had followed in company with the girl, and whom he had overheard talking to Miss Wade.

The street was a sharp descent, and was crooked too, and the man (who, although not drunk, had the air of being flushed with some strong drink) went down it so fast that Clennam lost him as he looked at him. With no defined intention of following him, but with an impulse to keep the figure in view a little longer, Clennam quickened his pace to pass the twist in the street which hid him from his sight. On turning it, he saw the man no more.

Standing, now, close to the gateway of his mother's house, he looked down the street: but it was empty. There was no projecting shadow large enough to obscure the man; there was no turning near that he could have taken; nor had there been any audible sound of the opening and closing of a door. Nevertheless, he concluded that the man must have had a key in his hand, and must have opened one of the many house-doors and gone in.

Ruminating on this strange chance and strange glimpse, he turned into the courtyard. As he looked, by mere habit, towards the feebly lighted windows of his mother's room, his eyes encountered the figure he had just lost, standing against the iron railings of the little waste enclosure, looking up at those windows, and laughing to himself. Some of the many vagrant cats who were always prowling about there by night, and who had taken fright at him, appeared to have stopped when he had stopped, and were looking at him with eyes by no means unlike his own from tops of walls and porches, and other safe points of pause. He had only halted for a moment to entertain himself thus; he immediately went forward, throwing the end of his cloak off his shoulder as he went, ascended the unevenly sunken steps, and knocked a sounding knock at the door.

Clennam's surprise was not so absorbing but that he took his resolution without any incertitude. He went up to the door too, and ascended the steps too. His friend looked at him with a braggart air, and sang to himself: —

> "Who passes by this road so late?
> Compagnon de la Majolaine!
> Who passes by this road so late?
> Always gay!"

After which he knocked again.

"You are impatient, sir," said Arthur.

"I am, sir. Death of my life, sir," returned the stranger, "it's my character to be impatient!"

The sound of Mistress Affery cautiously chaining the door before she opened it caused them both to look that way. Affery opened it a very little, with

a flaring candle in her hands, and asked who was that at that time of night with that knock? "Why, Arthur!" she added with astonishment, seeing him first. "Not you, sure? Ah, Lord save us! No," she cried out, seeing the other. "Him again!"

"It's true! Him again, dear Mrs. Flintwinch," cried the stranger. "Open the door, and let me take my dear friend Jeremiah to my arms! Open the door, and let me hasten myself to embrace my Flintwinch!"

"He's not at home," said Affery.

"Fetch him!" cried the stranger. "Fetch my Flintwinch. Tell him that it is his old Blandois, who comes from arriving in England; tell him that it is his little boy who is here, his cabbage, his well-beloved! Open the door, beautiful Mrs. Flintwinch, and in the mean time let me pass up-stairs, to present my compliments — homage of Blandois — to my lady! My lady lives always? It is well. Open, then!"

To Arthur's increased surprise, Mistress Affery, stretching her eyes wide at himself, as if in warning that this was not a gentleman for him to interfere with, drew back the chain, and opened the door. The stranger, without any ceremony, walked into the hall, leaving Arthur to follow him.

"Despatch, then! Achieve, then! Bring my Flintwinch! Announce me to my lady!" cried the stranger, clanking about the stone floor.

"Pray tell me, Affery," said Arthur aloud and sternly, as he surveyed him from head to foot with indignation; "who is this gentleman?"

"Pray tell me, Affery," the stranger repeated in his turn, "who — ha, ha, ha! — who is this gentleman?"

The voice of Mrs. Clennam opportunely called from her chamber above, "Affery, let them both come up. Arthur, come straight to me!"

"Arthur!" exclaimed Blandois, taking off his hat at arm's length, and bringing his heels together from a great stride in making him a flourishing bow. "The son of my lady? I am the all-devoted of the son of my lady!"

Arthur looked at him again in no more flattering manner than before, and, turning on his heel without acknowledgment, went up-stairs. The visitor followed him up-stairs. Mistress Affery took the key from behind the door, and deftly slipped out to fetch her lord.

A bystander, informed of the previous appearance of Monsieur Blandois in that room, would have observed a difference in Mrs. Clennam's present reception of him. Her face was not one to betray it; and her suppressed manner, and her set voice, were equally under her control. It wholly consisted in her never taking her eyes off his face from the moment of his entrance, and in her twice or thrice, when he was becoming noisy, swaying herself a very little forward in the chair in which she sat upright, with her hands immovable upon its elbows; as if she gave him the assurance that he should be presently heard at any length he would. Arthur did not fail to observe this; though the difference between the present occasion and the former was not within his power of observation.

"Madame," said Blandois, "do me the honor to present me to monsieur your son. It appears to me, madame, that monsieur your son is disposed to complain of me. He is not polite."

"Sir," said Arthur, striking in expeditiously, "whoever you are, and however you come to be here, if I were the master of this house I would lose no time in placing you on the outside of it."

"But you are not," said his mother, without looking at him. "Unfortunately for the gratification of your unreasonable temper, you are not the master, Arthur."

"I make no claim to be, mother. If I object to this person's manner of conducting himself here, and object to it so much that, if I had any authority here, I certainly would not suffer him to remain a minute, I object on your account."

"In the case of objection being necessary," she returned, "I could object for myself. And of course I should."

The subject of their dispute, who had seated himself, laughed loud, and rapped his legs with his hands.

"You have no right," said Mrs. Clennam, always intent on Blandois, however directly she addressed her son, "to speak to the prejudice of any gentleman (least of all a gentleman from another country), because he does not conform to your standard, or square his behavior by your rules. It is possible that the gentleman may, on similar grounds, object to you."

"I hope so," returned Arthur.

"The gentleman," pursued Mrs. Clennam, "on a former occasion brought a letter of recommendation to us from highly esteemed and responsible correspondents. I am perfectly unacquainted with the gentleman's object in coming here at present. I am entirely ignorant of it, and cannot be supposed

likely to be able to form the remotest guess at its nature;" her habitual frown became stronger as she very slowly and weightily emphasized those words; "but, when the gentleman proceeds to explain his object, as I shall beg him to have the goodness to do to myself and Flintwinch, when Flintwinch returns, it will prove, no doubt, to be one more or less in the usual way of our business, which it will be both our business and our pleasure to advance. It can be nothing else."

"We shall see, madame!" said the man of business.

"We shall see," she assented. "The gentleman is acquainted with Flintwinch; and, when the gentleman was in London last, I remember to have heard that he and Flintwinch had some entertainment or good fellowship together. I am not in the way of knowing much that passes outside this room, and the jingle of little worldly things beyond it does not much interest me; but I remember to have heard that."

"Right, madame. It is true." He laughed again, and whistled the burden of the tune he had sung at the door.

"Therefore, Arthur," said his mother, "the gentleman comes here as an acquaintance, and no stranger; and it is much to be regretted that your unreasonable temper should have found offence in him. I regret it. I say so to the gentleman. You will not say so, I know; therefore I say it for myself and Flintwinch, since with us two the gentleman's business lies."

The key of the door below was now heard in the lock, and the door was heard to open and close.

In due sequence Mr. Flintwinch appeared; on whose entrance the visitor rose from his chair laughing loud, and folded him in a close embrace.

"How goes it, my cherished friend?" said he. "How goes the world, my Flintwinch? Rose-colored? So much the better, so much the better! Ah, but you look charming! Ah, but you look young and fresh as the flowers of spring! Ah, good little boy! Brave child, brave child!"

While heaping these compliments on Mr. Flintwinch, he rolled him about with a hand on each of his shoulders, until the staggerings of that gentleman, who under the circumstances was dryer and more twisted than ever, were like those of a teetotum nearly spent.

"I had a presentiment, last time, that we should be better and more intimately acquainted. Is it coming on you, Flintwinch? Is it yet coming on?"

"Why, no, sir," retorted Mr. Flintwinch. "Not unusually. Hadn't you better be seated? You have been calling for some more of that port, sir, I guess?"

"Ah! Little joker! Little pig!" cried the visitor. "Ha, ha, ha, ha!" And, throwing Mr. Flintwinch away as a closing piece of raillery, he sat down again.

The amazement, suspicion, resentment, and shame with which Arthur looked on all this, struck him dumb. Mr. Flintwinch, who had spun backward some two or three yards under the impetus last given to him, brought himself up with a face completely unchanged in its stolidity except as it was affected by shortness of breath, and looked hard at Arthur. Not a whit less reticent and wooden was

Mr. Flintwinch outwardly than in the usual course of things; the only perceptible difference in him being that the knot of cravat, which was generally under his ear, had worked round to the back of his head; where it formed an ornamental appendage, not unlike a bag-wig, and gave him something of a courtly appearance.

As Mrs. Clennam never removed her eyes from Blandois (on whom they had some effect, as a steady look has on a lower sort of dog), so Jeremiah never removed his from Arthur. It was as if they had tacitly agreed to take their different provinces. Thus, in the ensuing silence, Jeremiah stood scraping his chin and looking at Arthur, as though he were trying to screw his thoughts out of him with an instrument.

After a little, the visitor, as if he felt the silence irksome, rose, and impatiently put himself with his back to the sacred fire which had burned through so many years. Thereupon Mrs. Clennam said, moving one of her hands for the first time, and moving it very slightly with an action of dismissal, —

"Please to leave us to our business, Arthur."

"Mother, I do so with reluctance."

"Never mind with what," she returned, "or with what not. Please to leave us. Come back at any other time when you may consider it a duty to bury half an hour wearily here. Good-night."

She held up her muffled fingers that he might touch them with his, according to their usual custom, and he stood over her wheeled chair to touch her face with his lips. He thought, then, that her cheek was more strained than usual, and that it was

colder. As he followed the direction of her eyes, in rising again, towards Mr. Flintwinch's good friend Mr. Blandois, Mr. Blandois snapped his finger and thumb with one loud contemptuous snap.

"I leave your — your business acquaintance in my mother's room, Mr. Flintwinch," said Clennam, "with a great deal of surprise and a great deal of unwillingness."

The person referred to snapped his finger and thumb again.

"Good-night, mother."

"Good-night."

"I had a friend once, my good comrade Flintwinch," said Blandois, standing astride before the fire, and so evidently saying it to arrest Clennam's retreating steps, that he lingered near the door; "I had a friend once, who had heard so much of the dark side of this city and its ways, that he wouldn't have confided himself alone by night with two people who had an interest in getting him under the ground — my faith! not even in a respectable house like this — unless he was bodily too strong for them. Bah! What a poltroon, my Flintwinch! Eh?"

"A cur, sir."

"Agreed! A cur. But he wouldn't have done it, my Flintwinch, unless he had known them to have the will to silence him, without the power. He wouldn't have drunk from a glass of water, under such circumstances — not even in a respectable house like this, my Flintwinch — unless he had seen one of them drink first, and swallow too!"

Disdaining to speak, and, indeed, not very well

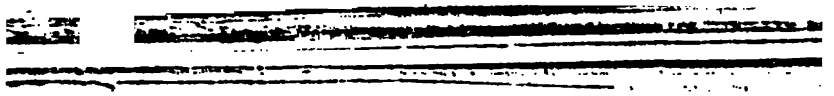
able, for he was half choking, Clennam only glanced at the visitor as he passed out. The visitor saluted him with another parting snap, and his nose came down over his mustache, and his mustache went up under his nose, in an ominous and ugly smile.

"For Heaven's sake, Affery," whispered Clennam as she opened the door for him in the dark hall, and he groped his way to the sight of the night sky, "what is going on here?"

Her own appearance was sufficiently ghastly, standing in the dark with her apron thrown over her head, and speaking behind it in a low, deadened voice.

"Don't ask me anything, Arthur. I've been in a dream for ever so long. Go away!"

He went out, and she shut the door upon him. He looked up at the windows of his mother's room, and the dim light, deadened by the yellow blinds, seemed to say a response after Affery, and to mutter, "Don't ask me anything. Go away!"



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